

**Ideological Underpinnings in
Select Malayalam Commercial Films
of the Post-Liberalization Era**

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Preface

This research work is an analysis of the commercial films in Malayalam of the post-Liberalization era to see how the socio-political and economic conditions reflect on the cultural artefacts (specifically cinema) of the times. The films analyzed here, are both products of the age as well as producers of the age, carrying the ethos forward. These films are results of globalization, and also help produce a society that, by and large, supports and accepts the values of globalization.

The Post-Liberalization era (after 1991) witnessed drastic changes in the social, political and cultural milieu of India. An obvious result of Capitalism, Economic liberalization in India, at the end of the 20th century, has resulted in a number of related issues such as privatisation, urbanisation, and westernization. In the 1990s, during the rule of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the government of India started a move towards privatization. In July 1991, the government started announcing new economic policies which had far-reaching consequences in Indian polity, economy and culture. The aim of these policies was to make the economy more market and service-oriented, to expand the role of private and foreign investment, and to orient the country towards the global market. The Finance Minister of India in 1991, Dr. Manmohan Singh, introduced a New Economic Policy (NEP). The new developments had three major features: Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization.

This research has taken a selection of films of the period from 1990 to 2015 that were huge box office successes, highly popular and considered to be influential among the Malayalee audience. As in all other aspects of society, these films, also, duly reflect the period of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization in India. The economic changes on the Pan-Indian scale, affected the everyday lives of people, their identities and relationships, their attitudes towards gender, nation, caste, and class, the spaces they move in, the ways in which they spend their money, and their values and belief-systems. Scholars have noted that Malayalam mainstream cinema at this time underwent a huge paradigm shift. Film consumption and fandom saw a steady and unprecedented rise. As a natural reaction, a category of films emerged, known as the New Generation Cinema. This will be explained in detail in Chapter Three. Though New Generation Cinema was an anti-superhero stream, the mere emergence of this did not bring a sudden change in the superstar culture.

In the movies from the 1990s to the present era, capitalism and globalization has been playing a central role in shaping the ideology of the narratives, in shaping the characters, plot situations and cinematic techniques. However, it is also seen that there is a strong feudal element, marketed under the umbrella of capitalism, in the mainstream popular movies of the 1990s (the time of the superstardom of Mohanlal and Mammooty) while elements of consumer capitalism are predominantly there in the films of the 2000s. This has to be read in comparison with the cinema of Kerala, before globalization, wherein the elements of feudalism did exist but was devoid of the explicit expression and fanatic celebration of the feudal artefacts. It is immensely relevant to analyze the

highly successful mainstream commercial films of this era, especially because these films had a great influence on the Kerala society during the advent of liberalization and globalization. This research project titled **Ideological Underpinnings in Select Malayalam Commercial Films of the Post-Liberalization Era** aims to find out how these films influenced the liberalized society to accept the values of globalization, and also how these films were shaped by globalization.

The main argument in my dissertation is centred on three hypothetical statements. The first statement is that the commercial films of the 1990-2015 period largely reflect the ethos of globalization in their depiction of plot, characters, situations and class/caste/gender paradigms. The second statement is that the films of the 1990s and those of the 2000s could be seen as two different categories that carry forward the same ideologies but differ in their response to the culture of globalization. The final statement is that the conservative capitalistic ideology runs through all the commercial films of the above said period. This dissertation closely analyses the films chosen as primary sources and test these hypothetical statements.

The main argument in this dissertation is that the films in the post-liberalization era (that is, 1990s to the present) are deeply rooted in the ideology of globalization, which defined the Post-Liberalization society. These films are marked by a pro-bourgeoisie ideology, accentuating class differences and struggles. The evolution of the film actors as commodities and further dispersal of ideologies are also studied in this dissertation. The films of the 1990s (or the Mohanlal-Mammootty era) that are studied here, focus on the feudal aspects of

the society where the protagonist is presented like a superhero or a king who is ruling a kingdom, attached to feudal values like loyalty, sacrifice, superhuman power, magnanimity and stoic suffering. In the neo-liberalized economy, the commodification of the actors is located as the saleable products. And thus, the dissertation looks at the films primarily, from the perspective of the actors as commodities and thus does not look into the identity and craft of the directors.

The most popular films of the 2000s which feature actors like Fahadh Faasil and Nivin Pauly give up the superhero image of the protagonist and present ordinary life and values where there are no heroes and villains. The films of this age generally show the protagonist making a grave error in judgement (hamartia or tragic flaw, like the tragic heroes of classical tragedy), undergoing hardships because of it, and finally reforming themselves. In both the periods under question here, the 1990s as well as the 2000s, all kinds of films were made and different kinds of films co-existed. However, an examination of the films reveals major trends and approaches, which is what the dissertation brings to light and analyzes. This research examines how the plot structures and paradigms of characterization in these films reflect the ethos of globalization in different ways. In spite of the erasure of the superstardom, the films of the 2000s also carry the Capitalist, anti-proletariat ideology that tempts consumption. The star as a commodity becomes more relevant in the city-based movies of the era of globalization.

This dissertation uses both the terms “films” and “cinema” in this dissertation but not interchangeably. Film is the parole and cinema the langue.

By the term “Malayalam cinema”, the dissertation denotes the industry, while individual texts are referred to as “films”.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, analyzes the historical and ideological context of liberalization and globalization. Chapters 2 to 4 discuss the primary sources in detail. The primary sources discussed in Chapter Two are four films from the 1990s: two Mohanlal films [*Devasuram* (1993) by I.V. Sasi and Renjith and *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997) by Shaji Kailas and Renjith] and two Mammooty films [*Dhruvam* (1993) by Joshiy and S.N. Swamy and *Valyettan* (2000) by Shaji Kailas and Renjith]. The film selection is based primarily on the expression of feudal culture in films of the two top superstars of Malayalam cinema, who were often compared against each other. The four films taken for study were huge box office successes of the time. The primary sources taken up in Chapter Three are six films from the post-2000 period: *The People* (2004) by Jayaraj, *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011) by Sameer Thahir, *Diamond Necklace* (2012) by Lal Jose, *Kunjanantante Kada* (2013) by Salim Ahamed, *Bangalore Days* (2014) by Anjali Menon and *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016) by Vineeth Sreenivasan. Chapter Three analyzes the issues of gender, class and caste in these primary sources. In all the three core chapters, the dissertation attempts a funnel-shaped analysis, as suggested by the esteemed professors who offered suggestions for improvement following my presentation at the end of one year of research. The ten primary sources have been placed in a context of 16 films each from the two periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. 32 films have been referred to in the analysis to support the observations,

arguments and conclusions of the dissertation, but the detailed content analysis has been done on the ten primary sources only.

This dissertation has chosen ten Primary Sources from a huge pool of thirty-two films, that come as inevitable secondary sources (all of which are referred to in the chapters and throw insight on the analysis). This was a very difficult task as Malayalam film industry produces more than 100 films a year and the period under study, on an approximate, saw more than 1000 films. The 32 secondary sources and the 10 primary sources were selected due to their mass appeal and expression and expansion of the fandom, under the period. The mass appeal of films, as a criterion, was chosen by the standards of reception by the general public. These films were marketed and celebrated for the characteristics features of globalization and liberalization of the respective times of release. The films were also selected on account of excessive presence and popularity on satellite television and online streaming sites, and their status as a cult in popular culture.

The ten films chosen for primary analysis were the representative films of the era and carry elements that set the trend. These films are among the high-grossing films of this period and were mass entertainers and set the general trend in the industry, leading to many imitations and adaptations in the form of other movies, songs, and television programs. In the case of the Mohanlal films, *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran*, across years, the superstar's gestures, actions, punch-lines and physical appearance began to be copied by the youth in society and appeared in great profusion in the social media in the form of trolls, WhatsApp stickers, memes, Tik Tok videos, youth slang, YouTube videos, and

so on (See Appendix 3). The songs of both these films were superhits and have been untiringly played in cultural programs, choreographed by students. The lyrical and musical quality of these songs has high literary and artistic merit.

Mamooty in the representative film *Valyettan* as well as other films of the time began to project the highly influential image of the sacrificing brother and family man. This feature of Mamooty films were a succession of his earlier films and got rebranded with a feudal assertion. His earlier film *Dhruvam* was not as high-grossing as the other films, but had immense appeal in popular culture, as illustrated by the memes in Appendix 3 that are from the 21st century, when the songs, scenes and dialogues of this film continue to have mass appeal.

Among the films of the 2000s, *4 The People* was a pathbreaker. It was a trend setter, in theme, content, treatment and music. Made on a shoe-string budget, the film was the top grosser of the year and introduced a youth culture, without the superhero figures. Jassie Gift as a Western-style musician-singer got popularized with this film. And this was a huge change in the Malayalam film music industry. *4 The People* could be seen as a clear break from the movies with the feudal overdose. It could also be seen as a precursor to the category of movies that flourished after 2010. *Diamond Necklace* and *Bangalore Days* were high-grossers and continue to have wide popularity. Both these films endorsed the new age culture of consumption and globalization. *Bangalore Days* also marked the beginning of the emergence of Parvathy as a youth and feminist icon.

Jacobinte Swargarajyam has been selected because it has a unique place in Kerala society. It was the first film to show Gulf-life in realistic detail, and in

Kerala society, from which a large number of people live and work in the Gulf countries, this film came to represent the NRI-Malayali's identity and dilemmas. Like an analogue of the "American Dream", this film presented the "Gulf Dream" of the globalized Malayali which was very different from the stereotypical struggles of the Gulf Malayali dramatized in 1980s films like *Visa* (1983) and *Varavelpu* (1989). Memes, dialogues and scenes from these films infiltrated into social media and popular culture in large quantities.

Chaappa Kurishu was selected because it represented another new trend in Malayalam cinema. This film took many of its elements, especially the sensibility from the middle cinema of the 1980s. This will be discussed, in detail, in the first and second chapters. With this film, Malayalam cinema moved ahead to match up artistic sensibility to popular culture, in terms of film making. A new ethos of films sans the hypermasculinities and larger-than-life situations and superhumanly male lead characters was a result of this change. Films like *Annayum Rasoolum*, *Ee Adutha Kalathu* and *God's Own Country* that followed *Chaappa Kurishu* are dark and disturbing, seeking to unsettle the Malayali presumptions of happiness, morality, success and equality, exposing Malayali hypocrisy and corruption in different ways. These films pulled out the Malayalam film viewers from the comfort and happiness of tales of fairyland and modern Knighthood.

Kunjananthante Kada has been selected for another reason. This film is a Mammootty-starrer, and is different from all the selected films from the 2000s in that this does not focus on the youth and their problems, as a change. However, like all the other selected films, this film also focuses on the problems of a

society in the throes of change from the traditional to the globalized, and shows a society where all relationships are determined by money. This film becomes important mainly because of the lead and titular character played by Mamooty – a superstar of the 1990s. The character of Mamooty is in sync with his kind-hearted peasant self of the 1980s movies and recollects that era of Malayalam cinema, when he was not ascribed with the superhero status. This is relevant because the category of movies called the “new generation movies” of the post 2000 era, could be seen recollecting instances from the content-driven Malayalam movies of the 1980s.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and draws upon the theories of base-superstructure and commodity fetish of Karl Marx, along with the theories of Richard Dyer, Osella and Osella and C S Venkiteswaran, pertaining to the concept of starhood in movies. The first chapter, that forms the theoretical base to the study, draws the historical and political context in which Neo-liberalization was introduced to India, and also looks at the repercussions generated thereof. In the first chapter, the dissertation draws upon socio-political theories of Globalization, late Capitalism, Culture Studies, Media and Film Studies, ranging from Noam Chomsky, Fredric Jameson, Anthony Giddens, Laura Mulvey, Susan Sontag, Arjun Appadurai, Arundhati Roy, Madhava Prasad and Ashish Rajadhyaksha. The introductory chapter would examine Globalization, from the Marxist perspective of production and distribution and study how media industries work in the globalized world to create commodity fetish, around the actors. After a brief introduction to the basic premise of the project, the chapter will proceed to present the theoretical contexts and gives a

detailed overview of corporatization and globalization of cinema that changed the nature and scope of the medium completely. By looking into the history of Malayalam cinema and the political developments in the state, from the moment of its establishment as the first elected Communist government in the country to the present times, this chapter traces the evolution of globalization in the Malayalam film industry.

Chapters Two to Four are the core chapters which present the analysis of the primary sources which was done with the help of a Film Analysis Worksheet that was developed for this purpose (see Appendix 1). In Chapter Two, titled “Neo-Feudal Reversion”, the analysis of the films in the light of Marxist theory of commodity fetish and Richard Dyer’s theory of Stardom, as well as that of C.S. Venkiteswaran where this dissertation analyzes the rise of Mohanlal and Mammooty as superstars in the context of Bollywood and Kollywood (Tamil cinema). Citing theorists like Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Sherwin Rosen, the dissertation has attempted to show how the superstar era developed from the previous age of the 1980s, and how the superstar age is rooted in values of masculinity as well as upper caste dominance, thus making clear the way Capitalism has employed feudal nostalgia. The chapter traces the history of cinema in Kerala to locate the growth of superstar images in the 1990s. The chapter looks at the way in which Capitalist market sells feudalism as a commodity in the making of the superstar persona. The theories of base-superstructure and commodity fetish, as formulated by Karl Marx come in handy while analyzing the movies taken for study, in this chapter. Chapter Two also discusses, the careers of Mohanlal and Mammooty separately and connects the

elements in their career and films with those of other superstars of the era, such as Suresh Gopi and Dileep and contrasts it with the popularity status and lack of star imaging of great actors of Malayalam cinema, like Sathyan and Prem Nazir who were immensely popular before the 1980s. An analysis of character stereotypes played by these actors, such as the politician or Gulf Malayali, has also been done. Some of the important leitmotifs used in the films discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four are illustrated with images from the films in Appendix 2.

Chapter Three, “New Generation Resistance”, focuses on the elements of consumer capitalism in post-2000 movies in the light of the Marxist theory of commodity fetish and Richard Dyer’s theory of the star. The Chapter begins with a detailed introduction to the features of what has come to be called the trumpet calls to the New Generation cinema that emerged in a full-fledged form around 2010. Actors like Fahadh Faasil, Dulquer Salman, Jayasurya, Nivin Pauly and Vineeth Sreenivasan, by these films, have redefined the concept of the hero/superstar as well as hypermasculinity, and mutated the larger-than-life representation of characters as superhuman beings and idol-building of superstars in the industry, like Mamootty, Mohanlal, Dileep, Suresh Gopi, and even Prithviraj.

These films also show that even as globalization seems to offer innumerable opportunities to the new and younger generations, globalization also enslaves humanity to uncontrolled desire and consumption, destroys natural life and presents a desperate crisis. Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetish is employed to analyse this trend, as the theory of base-superstructure. This chapter

analyses in detail the characters played by Fahadh Faasil as representatives of this crisis in the post-globalization generation. In the films of the 1990s, the hero stands outside the corrupt system and by uprooting the allegorical evil, reestablishes order in the system. Many of the characters played by Fahadh Faasil have the reverse progression. Their journey is inward and self-transformatory, not outward into the society to change the social structure. The analysis of the post-2000 films in this chapter was strengthened by theoretical reading on concepts like Space, Mall culture and Urbanity, especially theorists like Peter Brooker and Doreen Massey.

The fourth chapter titled “Caste-Gender Ramifications” deals with issues of gender, class and caste in the select films. Though gender and caste, discrimination and oppression have been a running theme since the beginning of Malayalam cinema, the predominant perspective has certainly been patriarchal and supportive of the upper castes/classes. The chapter analyses in detail gender, caste and class in Malayalam cinema in general, and gives a thorough overview of contemporary films, with special emphasis on the primary sources. The concepts of class creation and commodity fetish, as well as the base-superstructure of Karl Marx explain the representation of identities studied in this chapter. The theory of the star by Richard Dyer is used to explain the absent representations of the subaltern in commercial Malayalam movies. The topic dealt in this chapter is a vast one and has more dimensions than being a foil to the mainstream hegemony of stars. It would require an entire dissertation to deal with the issue. This dissertation looks at the subaltern identities only from the perspective of the anti-thesis to the mainstream *savarna* hero. The chapter

examines the progressive weakening of the institutions of masculinity and heterosexuality in Post-Liberalization films in Malayalam, which has also opened up debates on Dalit identities, the harsh realities of suburban, rural communities as well as the so-called criminal lower classes of the cities.

The concluding chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the findings of the research project and offers personal insights on the state of Malayalam cinema in the post-Liberalization society, from a Marxist perspective. This chapter also touches upon popular films released after 2015, which is the period of a few primary sources, to analyze emerging trends. The dissertation is a study of the capitalist indoctrination of the cultural arena of Malayalam cinema, in accordance with the ethos of the post-liberalization society.

Chapter One

Introduction

The introduction of the Neo-Liberalization policy of the 1990s was a watershed moment in Indian economics and it changed the way Indians consumed (and produced) and interacted as a society. In the 1990s, during the rule of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the government of India started a move towards privatization. In July 1991, the government started announcing new economic policies which had far-reaching consequences in Indian polity, economy and culture. The aim of these policies was supposed to strengthen the economy and to make it more market and service-oriented, to expand the role of private and foreign investment, and to orient the country towards the global market. The Finance Minister of India in 1991, Dr. Manmohan Singh, introduced a New Economic Policy (NEP). The new developments had three major features: Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization.

The entry of the Global markets into the Indian scene brought in new ways of economic and social behaviour. Cinema, identified as an art form with strong commercial element, even in its infant stage, underwent massive change. The commercial possibilities and dimensions of cinema were expanded by Neo-Liberalization, aided by the diverse technological advancements. These technological and marketing advancements in the international scene reached

India and Indian movies started travelling abroad. The global capitalist character got imbibed in cinema as much as in the cultural and social sphere. Eventually, the commercial films after the 1990s carried the ideologies of the global market. This ideology of the global market is analyzed in this dissertation, in the context of select representative commercial films in Kerala, released after the 1990s, till 2015. This dissertation looks into select Malayalam Commercial films to decipher the symbiotic relationship between films and the socio-political conditions, determined by the economic forces brought in by the policy of Neo-Liberalization and the discourses thus generated.

In the state of Kerala, Global economy, brought by the Neo-Liberalization policies under the Manmohanomics revision, worked towards destabilizing a long history of Renaissance and class struggle based on Marxist Ideology. Without the distinction of commercial, art-house or middle cinema, Malayalam cinema industry had been radical and modern in its approach of the human condition. Neo-liberalization, with its commercial approach, brought in a changed situation and dismantled the social progress envisioned by the Marxist government of the 1957.

This chapter tries to comprehend the cinematic discourse by locating the economic forces, in Kerala under work, by reading it in a Marxist light. The Marxist concepts of base-superstructure and commodity fetish are employed to get to the roots of the capitalist ideology that pervades the Commercial cinema of Kerala. This study also looks at the emergence of the superstar self of Malayalam cinema, into a commodity, after the 1990s, by using the theories of Richard Dyer, M.S.S. Pandian, S.V. Srinivasa, Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella and C.S.

Venkiteswaran. To understand the ideological undercurrents of the economic design of Mainstream Malayalam cinema, under the forces of Neo-Liberalization, a survey of the history of Indian economic structure till the Neo-liberalization and the history of Kerala as a state and its history of economics and politics needs to be discussed in this chapter.

Indian society and culture are characterized by diversity. India has numerous languages, religions, art forms, architectural traditions, culinary practices and customs which differ from place to place within the country. Indian history is several millennia old and embraces various changes. In other words, India is a truly plural society in every sense which thrives on “Unity in Diversity”. This synthesis has made India a unique mosaic of cultures. Indian culture has only become more tolerant and resilient due to foreign invasions, immigration from other parts of the world, and the co-existence of many languages, customs and religions.

Predominantly, an agrarian society, in India, at the time of independence, most of the rural people were employed in agriculture, and remained very poor. The first government of India under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized the growth of science, technology and industries, and adopted a mixed economy. Thus, India developed into an industrial and urban society in the post-independence period. However, in the early years after independence, the rural economy still played a significant role in the overall economic and social growth of the country. However, in the post-liberalization era, the rural economy has deteriorated and farmer suicides have increased to alarming rates.

The role of urbanization in the process of economic growth and social change is very important. Urbanization is a natural part of the development process and involves rural-urban migration. It helps in industrialization. Urbanization also enhances the quality of lifestyles and provides more employment. Rapid urbanization leads to many problems like increasing slums, decrease in standards of living in urban areas, and also environmental damage. Urbanization began to accelerate in the post-independence period and cities began to grow. People from villages moved to cities in search of better fortunes.

During this period, with Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister, India projected its image as a socialist state in the Soviet model but faced numerous problems which gave it the image of a chaotic and repressive nation, as Salman Rushdie has presented in *Midnight's Children* (1981). Though Nehruvian rule was progressive, liberal and secular, Nehru, and his successor Indira Gandhi took great efforts to prevent leftist interventions in society and economy. The notion of “development” that the regimes of Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi thrust upon the country had short-term goals and did long-term damage to the socio-political fabric of India and to its environment.

The last phase of the 20th century witnessed economic reforms across the developing world, and these reforms were imposed by international financial institutions. There were attempts to liberalize the Indian economy in 1966 and 1985. The first attempt at liberalization in 1966 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was reversed in 1967. Thereafter, a strong version of socialism was adopted. The second major attempt was in 1985 by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The process came to an end in 1987. In the 1990s, once again economic

liberalization happened in India. The analysis of the Liberalization era has been poignantly done by Matthew McCartney in the book *Political Economy, Growth and Liberalization in India 1991-2008* (2016). McCartney argues, “1991 marked not a break but a continuation of liberalizing economic policies” (34).

In the 1990s, during the rule of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, the government of India started a move towards privatization in order to overcome the alleged economic crisis triggered by a Balance of Payments situation. In July 1991, the devaluation of the Indian currency took place and the government started announcing new economic policies. The aim of these policies was to make the economy more market and service-oriented, to expand the role of private and foreign investment, and orient the country towards the global market. Most of these changes were made as part of the conditions laid out by the World Bank and the IMF as a condition for a \$500 million bail out to the Indian government in December 1991.

The Finance Minister of India in 1991, Dr. Manmohan Singh, introduced the new reforms to end the “Licence Raj” (introduced by the British) that prevailed in India at that time. The main objective of the new economic policy (NEP) in 1991 was to plunge Indian economy into the field of Globalization and to give it a new drive on market orientation. The new economic policy intended to reduce the rate of inflation and to remove imbalances in payment. New economic policy aimed to accomplish economic stabilization and to convert the economic policies into a market economy by removing all kinds of unnecessary restrictions. New economic policy wanted to permit the international flow of

goods, services, capital, human resources and technology, without many restrictions.

These new developments had three major features: Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. The main thrust of the NEP was Liberalization. This gave greater freedom to entrepreneurs of any industry, trade or business and governmental control on the same was reduced to minimum. The main features of liberalization are lessened government control and freelance, Capital Markets opened for private entrepreneurs, simplification of licensing policy, opportunity to purchase foreign exchange at market prices, right to take independent decisions regarding the market, better opportunity for competition and widened liberty in the realm of business and trade. In India, privatization includes decentralization of the transfer of the ownership of productive assets to the private sector, entry of private sector industries into the areas exclusively reserved for the state sector or which are considered exclusive monopolies of the state and limiting the scope of the public sector or stopping the diversification of the existing public sector undertakings. (McCartney 51).

The economic changes of the liberalization era happened at the same time as the rise of Hindu nationalism in its most dangerous form, India's revival of its nuclear program and military encounters with the nuclear power Pakistan (Sud 22-46). The changes in the economic policy also led to increased foreign investment, establishment of manufacturing and service sectors, and the rise of consumerism at the expense of the villages and a cleaner, healthier environment.

While the Congress government initiated these processes, it did not witness the full utilization of the changes that liberalization involved. The BJP utilized this opportunity to manipulate both the Indian economy as well as the consciousness of the Hindu society in the nation. Thus the concept of “Hindutva”, in a modern form, was reintroduced simultaneously with economic liberalization. The BJP government under Narendra Modi brought in an altogether new phase and explicitly connected Hindutva with corporate agenda to manipulate and control the Indian society. Arvind Rajagopal (2001) gives an analysis of this unholy alliance between BJP and liberalization:

Hindu nationalism worked at two levels, on the one hand offering the cultural and ideological accompaniment to liberalization for middle and upper classes, and at the same time translating it into a religio-mythic narrative that would win popular consent.... The alliance between economic liberalization and Hindu nationalism was opportunistic and unstable, but nevertheless, in the context, developed a considerable force and momentum. (39)

Hindutva is not simply a religious and political idea. The aim of the proponents of Hindutva is to recast India as a “Hindu Rashtra”, in complete opposition to India’s historical commitment to secularism. It attempts to redefine people’s understanding of themselves and of the nation, for which cinema is a very convenient medium. This is an obvious development of the process of the Hindutva nation-building that had started after Independence. Television, radio, newspapers and even school and college curriculum, if examined, reveals the

mechanism of nation-building on the line of the Hindutva Ideology. This was achieved with the help of state sponsorship of films and the television programmes funded by the State. Hindu nationalists are also fervent advocates of radical economic reforms, as evident from Narendra Modi's regime. Thus, the 1990s saw the infiltration of the Hindutva ideology in the liberalization era and its cinema.

Globalization, a natural evolution of Capitalism, defies a single definition. Roland Robertson gives importance to how globalization brings the world together: Globalization is "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (8). Another definition gives importance to globalization's potential for diversification: Globalization is "best considered a complex set of interacting and often countervailing human, material and symbolic flows that lead to diverse, heterogeneous cultural positionings and practices which persistently and variously modify established vectors of social, political and cultural power" (Lull 150).

The postcolonial theorist Arjun Appadurai has written about globalization from a subjective perspective, as he himself has been affected by the cultural instabilities and displacements involved in globalization. In the famous essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", Appadurai shows how the new cultural elements that reach a society under globalization are often indigenized to the local culture. Appadurai says that the complexity of the global market is related to the "disjunction" of economy, culture and politics. Appadurai points out that even while there is a growing interrelationship and

interdependence in these aspects of the globalized world, there is also an increasing disjuncture between them.

In “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue” (1998), Fredric Jameson summarizes the divergent opinions on globalization and connects multinational capitalism and globalization with postmodernity. He says that postmodernity, with its relation with globalization, goes hand-in-hand with the American military and economic domination throughout the world.

Indeed, in as early as the 19th century, in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had portended the overweening power that America would exert over the world: “Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way,” they posited (Marx and Engels 1985: 81), and then moved on to indicate the constant processes of change inherent in capitalism, the “everlasting uncertainty and agitation” that distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones (83). “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air” (83). This is an oft-quoted expression in analyses of globalization in exploring the impact of the increasing rate of economic, political, social and cultural change in the globalized world.

Noam Chomsky, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, marks a revolutionary moment in human sciences and has been an untiring critic of globalization and Americanization. With the now-famous phrase “old wine, new bottles”, Chomsky has asserted that globalization

is nothing new, but another form of capitalism with its age-old exploitative practices. He is distrustful of the phrase “anti-globalization” and regards it as a move to globalize social and environmental justice.

The strongest advocates of globalization are the remarkable and unprecedented global justice movements, which get together annually in the World Social Forum, and by now in regional and local social forums. In the rigid Western-run doctrinal system, the strongest advocates of globalization are called ‘anti-globalization.’ The mechanism for this absurdity is to give a technical meaning to the term ‘globalization’: it is used within the doctrinal system to refer to a very specific form of international economic integration designed in meticulous detail by a network of closely interconnected concentrations of power: multinational corporations, financial institutions, the few powerful states with which they are closely linked, and their international economic institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO, etc.). Not surprisingly, this form of “globalization” is designed to serve the interests of the designers. The interests of people are largely irrelevant. (Mishra 69)

The Global Culture approach betrays an anxiety about the increasing cultural homogenization occurring at a global level. As a result of globalization, people from culturally and politically diverse societies have begun to participate in a global cultural experience which is unparalleled in human history. Children in cities across the world play the same games, watch the same TV shows, enjoy the

same music, and are likely to want to eat the same kinds of fast food in McDonalds, Burger King or Pizza Hut. According to this perspective, there is alarming homogenization in the cultural practices of the 21st century. Both the World System and Global Capitalism approaches are concerned with explaining the continuing domination of capitalism in the world.

Capitalism in modern times has witnessed innumerable atrocities, crises, injustices and inequalities. In as early as 1867, Karl Marx predicted in *Das Capital* (also known as *Capital: Critique of Political Economy*) that inevitable class struggles between the working class (proletariat) and the ruling class (bourgeoisie) would precipitate to the point of weakening and destroying the capitalist system itself (Uno 175). The inequities of modern-day late capitalism and the horribly immoral and irresponsible activities of the corporations across the world make it necessary for researchers to have continuous discussions on late capitalism and its ill-effects on the society.

Kozo Uno attests to the fact that capitalism in its modern form, which is thought to have emerged in Northwestern Europe and Great Britain in the 16th and 17th centuries, has had a long and diverse history. The rise of capitalism in the 16th century marked the death of Feudalism as a dominant economic system. The underlying belief of capitalism is that wealth can be used to generate more wealth, and this was attained through privatization of production and through a market-oriented distribution system. Capitalism gave rise to economic inequality because the wealthy were considered more virtuous and divinely supported than the poor, who were considered akin to vice, crime and immorality. Capitalism

flourished with the growth of colonialism as well as science technology which provided easier access to raw materials and created the market.

Sitaram Yechury, the Marxist leader, argues that one of the major factors in accelerating the growth of globalization is the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. in December 1991.

As this process of globalization was underway, came the collapse of the former Soviet Union and some of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe.... this convergence at the beginning of the decade of nineties set in motion a renewed aggressiveness by the remaining superpower, USA... under globalization, what we are witnessing today is an effort towards the economic recolonization of the third world and simultaneously a world that is sought to be dictated and ruled upon by US-led imperialism. (Yechury par. 4)

In the late 20th century, late capitalism took the form of globalization. This period is characterized by the growth of multinational corporations, globalized markets and labour, mass consumption, and the multinational flow of capital. These changes have profoundly impacted on the nature of politics, economics and society.

While the World System approach is not preoccupied with explaining globalization in itself, it has developed a model that divides the world into core, semi-peripheral and peripheral societies and economies that are exploited by the capitalist system. The computer hardware components needed to assemble personal computers or digital television sets may be produced in peripheral or

semi-peripheral societies to feed the consumer demand for these products in the core societies in the West. The production of certain media texts such as animation movies or video games takes place in peripheral and semi-peripheral societies in order to maximize profits for transnational multimedia conglomerates and to feed consumer demand in core and non-core countries. There is an exploitation of the working class and the peripheral economies implicit in this practice.

The concern about the various classes in society had been at the heart of the theories of Karl Marx. In the 19th century, the economic concepts of Karl Marx proposed possible theories and explained the formation and struggles of different classes based on economics. In the 21st century, when this dissertation attempts to decipher the Capitalist consumerist trends in Malayalam cinema, those very theories of Karl Marx come most handy in understanding the class and caste differentiations and dynamics. In his “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains class relations in the light of the modes of production prevalent. Marx proposed that all social phenomenon is determined by material conditions and economic activities. It is the mode of production that influences social phenomenon. In order to explain his conception of history, Marx introduced the terms of “base” and “superstructure”. Marx stated in the “Preface” that each period in history evolves out of a particular mode of production.

According to Marx, a mode of production is the way in which a society is organized (if it is a slave culture, feudal culture or capitalist culture) to produce the material commodities (food, shelter) essential for the society. Marx says that

each mode of production generates particular ways in which the material essentialities are obtained, social relations governing the workers and the people who control them, and finally, generates specific socio-cultural institutions.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (Marx “Preface”)

To summarise, Marx believed that the means by which a society produces its modes of existence determines the political, social and cultural engagements of the society, as much as its future development.

Within this context of production, Marx says, the forces of production and the relations of production form the “base”. The forces of production are the raw materials, tools, technology, workers and skills while the relations of productions are the close relations of the people engaged in production. “The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation” (“Preface”). Marx added that each mode of production is different and it produces some fundamental relations of production, which leads to the further development of relations in other streams as well. Marx cites the example of the slave mode where the relation is that of the master and the slave. The feudal mode of

production involves the relation between the lord and the peasant while the capitalist mode of production involves the bourgeoisie and proletariat relationship. In such modes of production, the class position of an individual is determined by one's relationship to the mode of production; it the individual is the one who dictates the terms or abides by.

Marx's concept of the "superstructure" includes political, legal, educational and cultural institutions, which have definite forms of social consciousness. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx "Preface"). The institutions generate the social consciousness. Marx's economic perspective proposed that the "base" conditions and determines the "superstructure" – its content and form. It is the "base", that is, the mode of production that determines the specific framework for any sort of development in the society. "The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure" ("Preface"). In short, the "base" dictates the "superstructure". In a capitalist society, according to Marx, education is a necessity for employment, while in a feudalist society it could be a threat to the system. Marx adds to this idea by saying that even in a capitalist society, education can be used to actively organise workers into opposing the exploitative capitalist regime. Thus, superstructure is not a mere by-product of the "base" but it is also a terrain for both incorporation and resistance in terms of class struggle. The base-superstructure could be understood in terms of economic conditions. The economic conditions create the conditions that determine the behaviour of the superstructure. But identical social conditions result in different modes of

consciousness and behavioural patterns, as they affect different classes in different ways, with respect to their position in the economic structures.

New technological tools and the disintegration of borders is one major feature that has seen unprecedented changes in global market. Globalization is the process of making the whole world a single market beyond the geographic and national boundaries. The giant leaps made in transport and communications sectors efface the boundaries of nations and change our conceptions of time. The most important of these advances is the internet and electronic telecommunications technologies as well as the developments in air travel.

Capital does not positively enhance natural resources or raw materials or direct employment in the long run, and make local economies unstable and volatile. Thus, this late capitalist trend of globalization has a neo-imperialistic edge. The Marxist leader and politician Sitaram Yechury in the article “Socialism in the Era of Globalization”, attests to the alarming rate of growth of Finance Capital in the world:

Towards the end of the 20th century, more specifically in the decade of the eighties, this process of centralization led to gigantic levels of accumulation of capital. The beginning of the nineties saw the internationalization of finance capital which had grown in colossal leaps ... Subsequently, this globally mobile finance capital had acquired unprecedented dimensions. (Yechury par. 6)

Internationalization of manufacturing is an important change that globalization brought in. While production was a local phenomenon before globalization, today it has gone international. The trend is no longer to produce commodities in one

place and distribute world over, but to manufacture the components of commodities in several parts of the world and assemble them. Thus, production in the globalized era removes the producers from the scene and the relationships between the workers are reduced to nil.

As Fredric Jameson has pointed out in the book *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), capitalism in the era of globalization has only virtual and intangible connections with the producers as well as consumers, as against Market Capitalism or Monopoly Capitalism. This indeed is one of the dangerous pitfalls of globalization.

In the view of the critics of globalization, this late capitalist phenomenon amounts to neo-imperialism or cultural imperialism. Tanner Mirrlees in the book *Global Entertainment Media: Between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Globalization* (2013) avoids a simplistic good or bad view of global entertainment media and analyses the effects of globalization from different angles.

One of the positive outcomes of globalization was evident to me in the course of writing this chapter. There was literally an explosion of information and resources, and I found that books and articles from across the world written from a bewildering variety of perspectives on globalization are available on the internet or on e-commerce sites. This access to all sorts of information and experiences, and the shrinking of the world into the cyberspace is indeed one of the greatest advantages as well as dangers of globalization.

The most vehement critics of globalization in India include Arundhati Roy, P. Sainath and Vandana Shiva. Arundhati Roy has persistently contributed to debates on feminism, postcolonialism and globalization in her fiction as well as non-fiction. Roy has been recognized as the spokesperson of India's anti-globalization movement. In an interview with David Barsamian, Roy presents privatization and globalization as the tools of a centralized, oppressive system:

I'm talking about the politics of development, of how do you break down this completely centralized, undemocratic process of decision-making? How do you make sure that it's decentralized and that people have power over their lives and their natural resources? Today, the Indian government is trying to present privatization as the alternative to the state, to public enterprise. But privatization is only a further evolution of the centralized state, where the state says that they have the right to give the entire power production in Maharashtra to Enron. They don't have the right. The infrastructure of the public sector in India has been built up over the last fifty years with public money. They don't have the right to sell it to Enron. They cannot do that. (Roy progressive.org)

She also asserts that "The only thing worth globalizing is dissent."

The journalist P. Sainath, a vehement critic of globalization, has characterized the phenomenon as the "globalization of inequality." In his own words, "Of the many trends in globalisation, the crucial one today is corporate

globalism. A world driven by and for corporate profits. Based on corporate greed rather than human need. It's a world marked by the collapse of restraint on corporate power, in every continent." He gives the example of "engineered inequality" in India and argues that globalization brings even more divisive elements into already existing inequalities:

The huge new inequalities are feeding into existing ones ... We are closing small health centres and opening super luxury hospitals that 90 per cent of Indians cannot afford; shutting down primary schools and opening colleges based on exorbitant donations for admissions; closing libraries and opening multiplexes; winding up bus depots and services as we expand the airport systems. (Sainath youtube.com)

The impact of globalization is rooted in the new age electronic media and thus the growing power of the media. The media can powerfully control, influence and manipulate the minds, thoughts and interests of the people. The utopian standards of everyday living and aspirations of the future generated by corporations are deeply ingrained in people's minds by the media. In other words, the media justify the corporate utopian ideals of consumerism, luxury and superficial pleasures. E.S. Herman and R.W. McChesney, in *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism* (1998), have argued that the media have become missionaries of the Gospel of a consumerist life which engulfs all aspects of creativity and culture.

Global corporations have a symbiotic relationship with media conglomerates. Local cultures have more or less transformed into a global culture that is saturated with TV shows, movies, advertisements, entertainment programs and new age news. Entertainment, news and educational shows have amalgamated into what is now called “Infotainment”. Journalism has been redefined and has arguably died with the influx of new phenomena like paid news, Public Relations-oriented journalism, news manufacturing, fake news and the social media. News broadcasts as well as educational programmes take on the nature of shallow entertainment shows and “reality shows”. In the context of globalization, popular culture and everyday life have become the hottest commodities.

In a consumerist, market-oriented society, the value of all products is determined by their success or failure in the market. This is true about cultural products too. But before the age when the market forces completely took over the cultural products, culture and its artifacts had a broad and profound relevance in society, apart from mere commercial success. For example, before the era of liberalization, during the independence movement, social reforms movements, equal rights movements, workers and peasant revolts, and so on., music, drama, literature, arts and cinema were valued for their social content. The best example would be the contributions made by K.P.A.C. to Malayalam drama in Kerala. It is true that commercial success was indeed a parameter in the valuation of these arts in the pre-liberalization era. However, even their commercial success was appreciated in terms of their general acceptability among the people and their social relevance in those times.

The Global Capitalism approach holds that the globalization of capitalism is central to the globalization process. This is controlled by transnational corporations which in many cases are more powerful in economic and political terms than the countries they exploit, in terms of labour, raw materials or markets. Fundamental to the Global Capitalism perspective is the argument that globalization depends upon the promotion of the ideology of consumerism. This is done by advertising, sponsorship and product endorsement, and also in the promotion of certain lifestyles as being more desirable than others. Such a desirable lifestyle is presented, for example, in advertising, where specific kinds of body image for men and women are repeatedly projected and promoted. Advertisements give implicit messages that if you buy this car or deodorant or tea, you will somehow be transformed and become more desirable to other men or women. The desirable lifestyle is the Western and more particularly American.

The modern market and its products are not interested in the human struggles for survival or in offering practical solutions for them. At the same time, the market is not ready to spare these basic human issues either. Because of the demands of the market, in the era of globalization, cultural artefacts and experiences including poverty and struggle for survival, become transformed into commodities, having been stripped of the social relations and social values associated with them. This is related to the process of “reification”, or the process by which social relationships become reduced to commodities, which Karl Marx pointed out as a necessary outcome of capitalism. Because of

reification within the capitalist society, joy, happiness, love and such emotions become reduced to commodities.

The capitalist mode of production estranges individual struggle from the society. This begins with the detachment and final erasure of the basic struggle of the workers. This helps in the concentration of the society on the products and the associated statuses. The present consumer culture of today is a product of the economic climate of the 1980s that brought in change across the world. Though capitalism as a mode of production was envisioned to be capable of trickling down money to the lowest economic levels in the society, it turned out to be one of the most exploitative economy. The superstructure of the capitalistic base resulted in the social classes to be presented through economic identifiers and symbols.

Capitalism brought the belief that it is natural to gauge the value of objects with money. This turn is due to the modes of production. It has already been mentioned earlier how the base determines and conditions the superstructure. Capitalism gives values to things and not human beings or relationships. In other words, the relationship between individuals in a given society gets replaced by relationship between objects. The capitalist mode of production, does not work towards satisfying the simple needs of human beings with the help of goods. It conceives goods as values in terms of the economy. The commodities, in a capitalist society, are meant to be bought and sold and they convey more than needs, because the commodities, are associated with social and economic status of the individual in society.

Marx in the fourth section “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”, in the first chapter of *Capital* says that in a capitalist mode of production, the buyer will be aware of the physical properties and intended use (use-value) of the commodity but the place and person who produced the commodity remains unknown. Moreover, because the production of the commodity happens in different places or parts (within a factory), and is aided by machines in the final assembling, no single worker can be associated with the final commodity. “A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (158).

Capitalist mode of production severs the link between workers, engaged in the different processes of productions. No social relation is established and thus the whole procedure remains deceptively simple. The origin of private labour in such capitalist system is hidden with the relation to commodities themselves.

...the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [dinglich] relations between persons and social relations between things.

(160)

The society, thus born, determines social relationships in relation to commodities. And the labour is almost dead. This forms the bedrock of alienation and commodity fetish. Commodity fetish is a concept that Marx proposed to denote to this situation where value is accepted as something natural to things and consumers indulge in the product without having to think the alienation of the workers with the products, with each other and finally the alienation in the act of labour. This gives birth to a society that goes by the titillation created by the final product that appears in the market. This makes it easier for the consumers to identify with the false psychological needs that the market prompts to generate in them. The consumer enters a fragmented life where the spectacle makes them enter a repetitive cycle of working and consuming in a circular pattern. Finally, the society as a whole ends up fragmented.

Marx rejected all notions which sought to 'derive' value, that is social value, from use-value. According to Marx, in a capitalist process of production, social relationship of production is termed as capital. This, Marx says, results in a product being equated with final commodity and thus, the foundation of fetishism is achieved. Marx, in *Capital* takes the concept of fetishism and applies it on the economic arena. He says that the commodity is fetishized by the transformation of the commodity into a possessor of intrinsic values. The economic abstraction is translated, unconsciously, into a social value which emerges as the marker of economic status. "The mystical character of the commodity does not therefore arise from its use-value" (158). "The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social

characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (159).

The crux of Marx's concept of commodity fetish is that such a mode of production, very easily, tricks the consumer with associated signification of products.

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, by the dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange-value. Since exchange-value is a definite social manner of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing, it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange. (168)

According to Marx, the agents in this business of trickery are predominantly the media and films have very influential role due to the inherent visual nature. "It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (159). "It was solely the analysis of the prices of commodities which led to the determination of the magnitude of value, and solely the common expression of all commodities in money which led to the establishment of their character as values" (163). The consumers, Marx says, are lured into consumption by the effective masking of the modes of production. And the final concept of social status, and the joy of consumption makes everyone wanting to engage more in consumption. "If

commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values” (168). Marx opines that people are convinced about the importance of appearance over substance and thus, they engage in consumption to overcome class differentiation produced by this very exploitative mode of production.

Food, clothing, entertainment, religion, leisure and love get transformed by “commodity fetishism” into commodities deprived of their socio-cultural value and significance, and social relationships become equated with economic relationships. This is very true in the case of cinema, as well. Film industry in India, also, has undergone a complete transformation in the wake of liberalization and globalization.

For every human society, their regional and national cultures are very important. There is uniqueness in their music, literature and cinema. The cultural realm of a society is organically shaped and moulded by its uniqueness in livelihoods, traditions, history, beliefs, trade, traditional skills and knowhow, family structures and so on. Such an organic cultural realm has an inbuilt mechanism to resist and fight against inequality, exploitation and injustice. Art, literature and cinema that are produced in such an organic cultural milieu always reflect the struggles and resistances within a culture and perform the important political task of reformation and renewal of its society.

There has been a longstanding debate, even, among the Marxists, regarding the social relevance and commitment of art. Marxist critics like Raymond Williams and Georgy Lukacs have provided well-known critiques of modernism and censured it for its apolitical and uncommitted approach to the social significance of art. Marxists endorse a realistic depiction of life and society in art and cinema while globalized cinema has a penchant for postmodern, unrealistic and even senseless forms of expression created by technological spectacles of existence postmodern society. This often alienates the viewers from humanity and “species essence” and from the real problems of lived realities. This is antithetical to the traditionalist view that art should reflect human ideals that are global, timeless and universal (Ryan 135-36). The late capitalist, globalized forms of art on the other hand are completely devoid of critical commitment and connection with the society which produces it and are reduced to mindless mimicry of the superficial aspects of culture as demanded by the market forces.

Globalized media is in direct confrontation with the Marxist approach in its ideals of a single culture, nationality and a global citizenship. The ethnic and local art forms that resist injustices and inequality as mentioned earlier also have an ingrained capacity to resist the ideals of globalization (Stam 378-79). Globalized cinema standardizes and naturalizes false, timeless, rootless, contrived life situations that are divorced from real cultural issues (Stam 256-58). Marxist critics have relentlessly opposed globalized media and cinema for its lack of political and critical perspectives. They assert that cinema and other arts should

reaffirm and strengthen the cultural uniqueness, historicity and nationality of a locality.

Cinema has been the most suitable platform for cultural globalization. Not only did globalized cinema engulf local cinematic traditions, it also effaced other ethnic arts like drama, folk arts, and so on. True to the workings of globalization, cinema industry is firmly rooted in high capital investment and expensive technology for its production and screening. Thus, the cinema industry very soon began to function like a business conglomerate and became the best-suited tool of globalization. The symbiotic relationship between multiplexes and shopping malls is a pointer to this fact.

Globalized media, especially films became a commodity with a huge possibility in the market. The dimension of art as a commodity, in general, underwent massive change and this was reflected in the case of movies. Globalization worked in two ways. One is the sudden availability of foreign language films in open market and thus the exposure to world classics. The other way was from inside to outside wherein, National cinema got strengthened and was subject to foreign audience. This did impact the form of cinema because there had to be changes to meet the tastes of the International audiences, at times specific regional audience outside the Nation. These exposures and changes gave the possibility of multiplicity of expression and meaning. Star images are the main saleable factor in the films thus generated. A detailed analysis from the perspective of star studies will be done later in this chapter, to understand the consumerist elements in the commercial cinema.

The impact was most severely felt in Third World countries where the Third Cinema metamorphosized into the Third World cinema and moved away from addressing the issues under concern. The necessity to meet up to the international audience resulted in a natural dejection and outright rejection of indigenous issues and cinema, like other media, became puppets of a market-driven political campaigns. The paranoia in the public regarding the sudden opening of outside markets to it was never addressed with due concern and time. Globalized media spoke the language of power and consumer culture.

The role of cinema and Doordarshan in India was arguably to ascertain the idea of India as a nation. It is upon that basic formula that the state mechanism was built, even for later years. These agencies showcased heterogeneous identities in India but, finally, called for unity that disregards the multiple existences. The final identity that had emerged out of these state mechanisms was a middle-class Hindu ideology. This ideology realized its full potential and execution after globalization. Market-oriented model of cinema as a business did not address the subaltern spaces in India.

Ever since the introduction of cinema in India, the opportunities of cinema as a commodity was explored and utilized by early film makers, while an army of filmmakers perceived it as an art that could voice the matter of affairs and elevate to a philosophical realm. With increased possibility of the market by the introduction of global scope for business, cinema took a stark commercial turn, at times, disregarding its artistic value. By the end of the twentieth century, the strong political films that had made India a remarkable presence in World Cinema, sort of, were sidelined and commercial cinema ruled the roost.

Commercial cinema has always been one of the biggest industries in India, chiefly centred in Mumbai (Bollywood) and Chennai (Kollywood), second perhaps only to Hollywood in the world, and plays a central role in the negotiation of national identity. It has continued to be so in the post-liberalization era. However, as the Indian economy changed along with the end of the Cold War and arrival of global capital, the country's cinema industry has also undergone great changes. Economic liberalization and globalization have brought about sea-changes in themes, styles and contexts in Bollywood, producing new versions of the on-screen patriarch, the domination of the, fast track songs, the promotion of on-screen nationalism, patriotism and violence, the acknowledgement and acceptance of female sexuality as well as queer sexuality, and the rise of a new aesthetic paradigms of individualism, entertainment and freedom.

Since the 1990s, the industry has been increasingly corporatized. Several film production, distribution and exhibition companies have entered stock market listings and have issued shares to the public. Many theatres across the country have been turned into multiplexes and more digital cinema theatres are being set up. Indian movie export increased considerably, leading to themes and treatment becoming more international. The Indian entertainment and media industry today have a lot of support and opportunities—foreign investment, the impetus from the digital lifestyle and consumers' spending habits, and also due to advancements in technology.

Indian cinema, in the wake of globalization has become increasingly market oriented. Cinema turned into a corporate sector that follows a capitalist

feudal mechanism. In the pre-liberalization era, Doordarshan had played a pivotal role in keeping traditions and classics alive by producing historically and socially relevant programmes which were however quite backward in technological and artistic excellence. Even private channels that flooded the scene, later, followed the pattern of Doordarshan, regarding the basic ideology of the state. The usual theme of the family that upholds the middle class moral consciousness ruled the programme production. However, in the later post-liberalization period, after the mushrooming of private channels and the booming of corporate sponsors, globalized television as well as cinema in India has become completely rooted in spectacle and sensationalism. This is where they departed from and nailed down the market possibility of the Doordarshan. The war for your eyeballs or the battle for consumers' attention and TRP Rating are the decisive factors in getting corporate advertisements and hence in judging the commercial value of media programmes.

In the post-liberalization era, with the arrival of satellite television and international television channels, there was an unprecedented expansion of television. International films and television shows became easily available. Liberalization policy of the Indian markets led to the opening of offices of many US film distributors in India which, helped Indian filmmakers distribute their films through these International distributors. The growing diaspora population has also contributed on the consumption sphere. Indian cinema as a commodity saw a transnational representation. The more the distribution spread, more prominent became inclusion of cultural capital. Films with the theme of Non-Resident Indians (NRI) life and NRI culture portrayed the traditional values and

customs, in cognizance with the Modernist lifestyle. This happened to the limit that the accessories of culture that were showcased in such movies began to exist as branded products in the market.

By 1998, the Bollywood film industry, topmost among the money-churning film industries in India, developed an independent standing of its own when the National Democratic Alliance government granted cinema the status of an industry. With this, the custom duties on cinema were reduced, the nature of film financing changed and the corporate sector moved into film-making industry. Movies began to be made for the NRIs, and this changed the themes and treatment of the films. These changes were marked by the films made by three stalwarts—Sooraj Barjatya, Aditya Chopra and Karan Johar. The realization that these changes are lucrative came with Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994), a large-scale family drama that reintroducing the 'family' entertainment genre and became the first Indian film to cross ₹100 crores in worldwide collection. The films of this period took upon themselves the task of defining what is "Indian", and these definitions were often problematic, biased, fundamentalist and even fascist. This shift echoed across the many regional language films in India, though the scales varied.

Along with the changes in the production system, there were paradigm shifts in the exhibition and promotional system also. The introduction of online streaming and video-on-demand system has also drastically changed the nature of films and their reception, and impacted the film festivals like Cannes. Many films are now made with the primary purpose of online streaming. Films that fail

in box office become superhits in online streaming. Sarah Myles explains how online streaming on platforms like Netflix and Amazon has changed the film industry:

...between them, Netflix and Amazon are bringing cinematic quality work from high-profile filmmakers and performers to their customers – often far quicker than the traditional home entertainment release after a theatrical run, and sometimes bypassing theatres altogether.... Gone are the days of films relying on marketing, glamorous premieres, and a positive write-up in the national newspapers.... When they decide to spend time sitting and watching something, they scroll through that library until they spot something that grabs their attention – something that fits their mood, or interest right at that moment. It doesn't have to be a shining beacon of blockbuster glamour, or a gritty, sweeping drama – it just has to be enough to hold the attention for the next 90 minutes.... streaming platforms are succeeding precisely because they are constantly providing audiences with access to the kind of films that are rarely found in mainstream theatres, outside of crowded and expensive film festivals. (“Theatre vs. Streaming”)

Meanwhile, the nature of theatre-viewing also changed drastically. Single screen theatres of the past were replaced by multiplexes, starting from the metro cities. The corporatization of cinemas resulted in the promotion of films through websites, aggressive marketing for film music which had to compete with the

rising Indie-pop music, and rising costs of tickets which were sold as hyper products along with food, DJ dance programmes, award nights, and so on. The Bollywood stars no longer remained within their celebrity status, but began to be more accessible to the general public through television programmes, social activities, public stage performances, and so on. The Hindi film songs of the pre-liberalization era were rooted in the ethnic traditions of Classical music, mushaira, ghazal, qawwali, and so on. Globalized Bollywood songs, in competition with Indie-pop music, have shifted the focus to pop culture and Westernized dance, and the visualization of the song sequences are heavily and aggressively eroticized.

While the Bollywood dance sequences in the pre-1991 era employed junior artistes from lower middle-class or slum areas, accompanying dancers in contemporary Bollywood are highly skilled professional dancers, including foreign dancers. This trend started with Subhash Ghai's *Taal* (1999). Even the language of Bollywood movies has changed in the wake of liberalization and has given way to English and Hinglish. Thus, under tremendous pressure to satisfy the changing audience tastes and requirements as well as to meet international standards, Bollywood films became the site of "glocalization", a term coined by Robert Robertson in the essay "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," to denote the process which captures the dynamics of the local in the global and the global in the local.

In the article "'Shining Indians': Diaspora and Exemplarity in Bollywood", Ingrid Therwath argues that for decades before liberalization, the expatriate Indian served as the opposite for acceptable behaviour, a living

testimony of inappropriateness. In the mid-1990s, following the liberalization of the Indian economy, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the advent of a multiplex-going urban middle-class, the stereotype was turned around. The Non-Resident Indian (NRI) became the epitome of Indianness and embodied at once capitalist and consumerist modernity and patriarchal, Northern and Hindu traditionalism. Therwath quotes producer-director Yash Chopra as having declared during his address at the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), a government-sponsored conclave for the Indian diaspora, that “our moral responsibility is to depict India at its best. We’re the historians of India.... The Indian Diaspora must maintain its identity, its roots.” The films made in the post-1990s therefore portray Indian culture as family-oriented, Hindu, and diasporic and transnational. Such a depiction of nationalism comes within the purview of rightist nationalism. Therwath attests to this:

A very culturalist, essentialist and majoritarian view of Indian identity underlines this assertion. Ethnic nationalism and pan-Indianism gained currency during the 1990s while the country’s economy was being opened up after the first liberalization measures in 1991, which benefited most the middle classes and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party’s slogan ‘India Shining’, a paean to urban, yuppie, capitalist growth embodied by the IT sector, symbolized this period. Hence it is not surprising that the Non Resident Indian (NRI), who is imagined to be necessarily rich and westernized but who is also known to contribute financially to the *Sangh Parivar*, became a role model

for a fast growing middle class facing the challenges of globalization and its own anguish or feeling of guilt due to a possible acculturation. Unsurprisingly, the popularity of themes related to the diaspora and the nationalist ethnic and cultural discourse aimed at people of Indian origin living abroad reached a peak during the period corresponding to the BJP-led governments (1998-2004). The 1990s and early 2000s could in fact be considered the Golden Age of the NRI, heralded as the emblem of the emerging middle class and the new material aspirations of an India in the midst of economic liberalization. (4)

In the post-1990s films, the migrant Indian has therefore stopped to be a symbol of the 'Other' and has instead begun to represent a new model of the new Indian, globalized and modern, but always a nationalist at heart. His nationalism is constantly expressed by tropes like the national anthem or patriotic songs, flags, and in the dialogues by the use of the possessive pronoun before the words 'country', 'India' or 'Hindustan' and he overcomes all trials to finally reaffirm his 'Indianness' at the end of the film. Therwath connects the new acceptability of the non-resident Indian and his/her culture to the replacement of the word *vilayat* with *pardes* in contemporary cultural discourses:

The term *vilayat* gave way to *pardes* to designate the place of residence of overseas Indians. *Vilayat*, a Persian word derived from the Arabic *vilaya* meaning 'province' in contrast to the Persian homeland of Mughal rulers, was used during the colonial era to designate England and Europe, *i.e.* what was outside India,

and was always associated with immorality and social aberration. The root of the word *pardes* is *des*, meaning country, home. The suffix *par-* corresponds to both *per-* and *pro-* in Latin, evoking an idea of movement and of being proactive. *Pardes* is therefore much more positive than *vilayat* and does not actually entail either a spatial or a moral distance with the homeland (*pardes* can even sometimes designate a place within the national territory). Actually, more than half the films with the word *pardes* or *pardesi* in their title seen between 1931 and 2010 were made after the 1990s. (12)

The romantic or family comedies with a NRI hero sell 'Brand India' to the world while furthering the cause of capitalism and social conservatism in India. For the Indian elite audiences, these films are a way to celebrate the coming of India on the world stage. Bollywood films are a prestigious commodity because Indian commercial cinema is now the subject of festivals, exhibitions, television documentaries, university courses, and so on. These films which meet the expectations of NRIs as well as provide Indians with guidelines to liberal modernity are an important component of India's soft power. People across the world know India through Indian films and this underscores the growing importance of India.

In the article "Bollywood, Nation, Globalization: An Incomplete Introduction," Rini Bhattacharya Mehta marks the precise moment of the birth of globalized cinema in India as the release of Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). *DDLJ*, as the film came to be called, projects a Punjabi-

British man named Raj as the true Indian upholding the country's traditions and values and marrying the heroine Simran. Thus film broke many hitherto accepted Bollywood models and established new standards of nationalism and global identity. Mehta asserts:

Nation, despite not having gone away anywhere, has come back with a vengeance in globalized India.... As the Western news and media have nurtured and projected India's turn of the millennium image as an emerging super-power, a force to be reckoned with, a 'democratic', tamable alternative to red China, the official and unofficial ideological apparatuses in India have embellished the image, to be perpetuated at home and out in the world.... The patriotic Non-resident Indian, the content family, and India's 'just war' against terrorists and enemy-states formed a three-pronged cultural agenda for a post-cold war, neo-liberal, resurgent nationalism. (2-3)

While the revival of nationalism is one of the major features of globalized Bollywood cinema, the propagation of the ideals of Hindutva and patriarchy is another. In the article "It's All About Loving Your Parents: Liberalization, Hindutva and Bollywood's New Fathers," Meheli Sen gives an analysis of how the avatar of Hindi cinema in the globalization era shows a nexus between Hindutva (along with its feudal conceptions of the nation) and middle-class patriarchal notions of the family and gender. While Bollywood in the 1980s wallowed in action films and crime films, the family melodrama centring on a Hindu feudal family with a patriarch at its head took over in the 1990s which was

a very convenient medium for the Hindutva-liberalization dyad. An analysis of the commercially successful films of this period [for instance *Mohabbatein* (2000)], would reveal that the father invariably limits and manipulates the sexual, social and professional choices of the protagonist (who represents a new generation and new culture) and becomes a key figure in the presentation of “tradition”, “family”, and so on. This throws into light a curious problem—the conflict between the elite authoritarianism of the patriarch that was deeply ingrained in the feudal system, and the cultural logic of choice and the apparent freedom of action of the individual citizen-subject (which entitles him to be a free consumer in a liberalized economy). Meheli Sen also points out that films like *Mohabbatein*, the father is aligned to the world of big business, “effortlessly and comfortably at home in Bollywood’s imaginings of a market-driven economy” (156). This article thus powerfully argues, “A deep conformism, indeed conservatism, colors the ideological propensities of Bollywood’s slick new products” (168).

Another noteworthy aspect of globalized cinema discernible in Bollywood is the new definitions of subjectivity, freedom and enjoyment in the films of the post-liberalization era. Gautam Basu Thakur, in the article “Globalization and the Cultural Imaginary: Constructions of Subjectivity, Freedom and Enjoyment in Popular Indian Cinema,” examines the construction of desire, subjectivity and enjoyment in Bollywood films of the post-liberalization era, bridging the gap between what may be called a pre-globalized cultural consciousness and what is represented as the ethics of living within the universal social conditions of globalization. Analyzing the films *Guru* (2007,

Mani Ratnam), *Dor* (2006, Nagesh Kukunoor) and *Yun Hota to Kya Hota* (2006, Naseeruddin Shah), he notes:

Interestingly, this ideological project is not pursued with blatant and trenchant arrogance—globalized existence and cultural ethics are not outrightly predicated as good. Instead, these involve staging of conflict between what are established as redundant cultural morals of pre-global living and a new ethics of individualism, freedom and enjoyment. (76)

He points out that these films however project progress and development as ultimately oriented towards the ultimate goal of being globalized. One of the defining characteristics of the coveted globalized culture is that enjoyment forms a new ethical principle in it. In the analysis of *Dor*, Gautam Basu Thakur says:

... it is the individual [Meera], her desires and freedom to enjoy life, which is emphasized in the film. Though the film's critique of traditional values and mind frame is nothing new, its emphasis on 'freedom to enjoy' as resistance to this orthodox compartmentalization of a woman is completely original. 'Enjoyment,' it appears from the film, means being able to jive to popular music, wear fashionable clothes, and live a certain life of fantasy.... The free subject, the subject who breaks out of defunct cultural values, is thus essentially a subject who participates in the circulation of the globalized world markets. (81)

Thakur establishes that the films that are analyzed show a demand for a society with complete absence of prohibition or restraint by tradition or State, social customs or commercial regulations and quotes Slavoj Zizek's term "prohibition of prohibition" (Thakur 87).

In the article "This thing called Bollywood" (2003), Madhava Prasad also connects the ethics of pleasure with globalization and capitalism:

[Bollywood films] have figured prominently in the emerging new culture of India, where consumer capitalism has finally succeeded in weaning the citizens away from a strongly entrenched culture of thrift towards a system of gratification more firmly in its [capitalism's] long-term control. They have produced another variation of nationalist ideology of tradition and modernity, and most interestingly, they have relocated what we might call the seismic centre of Indian national identity somewhere in Anglo-America. (2)

Related to the new perceptions of freedom and individuality is the new configurations of female desire and the female body in the films of this period. Purna Chowdhury looks into this in her article "Bollywood Babes: Body and Female Desire in the Bombay Films Since the Nineties..." asserts that corporate materialism and Bollywood representations of womanhood and gender relationships are integrally related. The Bollywood heroines with their sculpted bodies and almost artificially perfect and eroticized appearances are a luxurious analogue to the spectacular images of Mumbai presented in these films: the

lavishly grand homes and offices stripped of social context and history, the swimming pools, race cars and honeymoon trips to Switzerland. There is in the post-liberalization era a “Bollywoodization” of Indian consciousness. Chowdhury highlights the transforming attitude towards female sexuality in the 1990s that “attempt to redefine the limits of feminine desire and question the traditional assumptions about its allure” (54). She shows how the “impure” attributes of the Western vamp such as cigarette-smoking, asset-flaunting and leg-spreading are now applied to the heroine to denote her liberation. Chowdhury continues:

It is a transformation that fits in with the changing attitudes of a significant section of the audience, who are women in their late teens and twenties, completely immersed in the culture of jeans and spaghetti straps and reinterpreting physical exposure as enabling, rather than commodifying.... Such explorations lead to significant interrogation of the traditional dichotomy between the ‘pure (read heroine)’ and the impure (read vamp).... The nineties inaugurates the New Woman, who in these new films is not only seen in western outfits formerly reserved for vamps, but who also throws herself at the scopophilic gaze even as she openly celebrates her own body with a *jouissance*, without surrendering her claim to the special status as a heroine. (54-55)

Chowdhury makes a significant observation in this context regarding Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1973), where she introduced the concept of male gaze. Although Mulvey’s observations are

extremely valuable, she regards sexuality as a primarily male impulse “to which a woman can only claim unconscious trans-sexual voyeuristic entry” (59). As against this, in post-liberalization India, women are claiming and experimenting with the erotic, and this transformation gives them a new aesthetic possibility of viewing, and “while the masculinist tools may not be dismantled, it may very well be disrupted by the insertion of a *different* perception of the female erotic” (59).

Bollywood has had an increased visibility in the international scenario since globalization. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, in her Introduction to the book *Bollywood and Globalization* (2011) makes a list of developments in the period (13). The India International Film Festival started in London in 2010 and has become very popular. Since 2005, alliances with Hollywood have surfaced, and *Saarwariya* (2005) was the first Hindi film to be produced entirely by a Hollywood-based film studio. In 2009, Shahrukh Khan became the first Bollywood star to present an award at the Golden Globe Awards Ceremony, and A.R. Rahman won two Oscars for his musical compositions for Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). All these point to how global politics and its relationship with multinational capital would cast a shadow on cultural production in Bollywood.

Apart from the NRI cinema, other films in India, including the regional language ones, followed suite. This was in cognizance to the opening of the global markets in India. The changes in market appeared in films, both as paid advertisements and unavoidable inclusions. Regional cinemas and non-NRI cinema in Bollywood, both, underwent changes other than the NRI culture, that

were integral to the evolution of Indian as a global market. Even the non-NRI films and other regional films were taken up by the international distribution agencies and production houses. This was a phenomenon unknown to the Indian film goers till Liberalization.

As the conditions of production changed, the dimension of the product also changed. The distribution mechanism, film formats, distribution medium, rules and the basic ideologies of representation underwent huge changes in compliance with the global scenario. Television and satellite broadcasting took over a greater chunk of the distribution system and India emerged as the film industry that, annually, produced most number of films. “The bulk of movies are produced in South India using Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, and Malayalam together. The output is between 400 and 500 films a year, which surpasses the combined Hong Kong and Japanese total. In short, Indian cinema is vast; also it is diverse” (Yoshio)

On a parallel level, there were films that did not wander into the paths of global changes. A pre-1990s trend was still visible in film making, especially regional language films than Bollywood. But the majority was on lines with Globalization. It was at this moment that academics developed an interest in film studies, as part of the discipline of Cultural Studies. The main interest of academic study of films vested in the socio-political, cultural and historical aspects, especially in terms of Nationalism.

The opening of global markets led to an easy flow of money to India by the Indian diaspora, across the world. Globalization, also, resulted in easy access

to foreign education and job arenas to Indians. This has had great relevance in the strengthening of the economy of Indian Cinema Industry.

... though Indian films are shown abroad, regionalism is still an important factor in attendances. As large numbers of Tamil immigrants live in Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, Tamil films are the prime focus of interest. In the Gulf countries the Malayalam films dominate as most of the migrants are from Kerala, particularly as their production is supported by capital from Gulf immigrants. Thus, Indians residing abroad exercise great power over the trajectory of India's cultural economy.
(Yoshio)

The advent of the cosmetics industry in India, various beauty pageants and the stepping of these winners into acting in films also brought in a perfect circling of the global market of cultural commodity.

Cinema, in the post-neoliberalization era, became a force that mobilized the masses and led to development of even fan clubs. The popularity of satellite channels led to the downfall of cinema in India. This was balanced by the neo-liberalization take of cinema. Moreover, melodrama as a mechanism spiced up with song and dance sequences had been the classical tested and proven formula that was successful. If cinema theatres emerged as a space of democracy, in the beginning, it emerged as one of the primary modes of disseminating the consumerist ideology. This era also witnessed, for the first time, blockbuster successes of films that was unheard of earlier. This happened on a symbiotic

basis with the enormous bodies of fan clubs that came to light. There are instances of films where fans used to watch the film every day or every week. The symptoms of consumption in the film industry started immediately after the markets opened up for the global economy.

These changes in the Global and Indian film industry had effects across the world. This dissertation looks at the way globalization has affected cinema in the Indian state of Kerala. Without the distinction of commercial, art-house or middle cinema, Malayalam cinema industry had been radical and modern in its approach of the human condition, from its beginning days. The study of globalization and commercial cinema in Kerala is relevant in the context of its political identity as being one of the first states in world history itself to have a Marxist Communist government democratically elected to power. In Kerala, Global economy, brought by the Neo-Liberalization policies under the Manmohanomics revision, needs to be studied in the context of a long history of Renaissance and class struggle based on Marxist Ideology. The dissertation is an enquiry into the ways in which Neo-liberalization, with its commercial approach, impacted the social progress envisioned by the Marxist government of Kerala, sworn into power in 1957.

In order to understand globalization in the context of Malayalam cinema, a brisk history of the political, social and artistic tradition of Kerala, from the time of its formation as a State has to be understood. Kerala has a unique status in India being one of the first states in world history itself to have a Marxist Communist government democratically elected to power. The Leftist political governments starting from the first ministry of E.M.S. Namboothiripad (1957-59)

contributed immensely to the cultural awakening of the 1970s. While many other parts of India reeled under communal troubles in the post-independence period, Kerala, despite political instability, did not succumb greatly to communal politics throughout the 20th century. However, Hinduism has been a central concern in Kerala society, reflected in late 20th century Malayalam cinema. Mainstream Malayalam films of the 20th century always showed the dominance of caste Hindus, and failed to engage with secularism or Dalit issues effectively. Malayalam cinema's preoccupation with Hinduism and caste has only increased and intensified in the post-liberalization period. The globalization of Malayalam cinema has also left its impact on the representation of gender, youth and patterns of consumption.

After the inception of the first government in Kerala, which was a Left government, in the year 1957, Kerala emerged slowly as an ideal model for governance, compared to many other states in India. The term "Kerala Model" emerged due to the radical policies created and implemented by the Communist government to ensure a better standard of life. In his first DT Lakadwala Memorial Lecture delivered in 1994, Dr. Amartya Sen observed, "[I]n respect of certain variables like average levels of literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality etc. conditions in India are enormously adverse compared with China, and yet in all these respects, Kerala does significantly better than China" (Qtd. in Kurien 70).

The "Kerala model" was a result of the meticulously planned development trajectory set by the Communist government, aid by pre-independence position of the Left. Farm-land re-distribution, combined by a

strong history of social struggles and movements based on caste and community, laid a solid base and gave proper propelltion to the post-independence developmental strategies. Kerala's history is replete with casteist hegemonical discourses. The labour division and production system was guided by this casteist hierarchy, based on social distancing and concepts of pollution. The pre-independence era ruled by the *savarnas* branded the Communist Party as anti-social. It was the Communist revolution that gave voice to the grassroots and resulted in the decline of the *savarna* community.

Once sworn in as a government, the Left agenda was to put an end to the casteist practice of controlling the economy and production and it introduced the Land Reform Bill in 1959. The emulation worthy statistics of health and education in Kerala owes greatly to the Land Reform Bill. The active involvement of the Communist Party, even in the pre-independence period, in Arts and literature enabled its reach to the community. This continued even after the first government came into being. The party was able to mould the sensibility of the general public by its involvement in the Arts and Literature, even in its formative periods. This had a lasting influence on the Malayalam psyche. 1970s and 1980s saw great propensity of political activity in literature and arts. When cinema came to Kerala (which didn't take much time after it was introduced in India), the ethos of the times got reflected well enough and Kerala came up with very poignant and critical films in the arena of Third Cinema.

The earlier position of cinema as a high art was utilized and made beautifully into a relevant political tool due to the involvement of the Leftwing political stand. The 1960s and 1970s saw great uprise in political cinema though

the genre of social realism. The impossibility of the stars of the period – Sathyan and Prem Nazir, in becoming superstars was mainly due to the serious and respectful positioning of cinema as a high art, during the period. The melodrama, as a genre, did not receive a respectful position in Malayalam cinema due to the same reason, while melodrama was ruling the roost in popular mainstream cinema, in Hindi and Tamil – the two major film industries at that time.

The first actor to receive mass attention and fandom was Jayan. But the era did not give birth to Jayan as a superstar, in the sense that Mohanlal and Mammotty could establish themselves. This was the difference in the political conditions and economic reasons during the respective periods. There was no scope for the actors to show superhuman traits in the times when Communism was bothered with class equality and anti-casteist views. The socio-economic reform of the 1960s and 1970s gave space only for social realism. Scientific temper and rationality was the face of the communist government in Kerala in the 1970s.

The production conditions also influenced the low budget social realism movies in Malayalam. The early film production was based in Madras and this economic reason was a very strong factor. By the 1980s, there was a shift in the economic fabric of Kerala due to the Gulf migration. This not only influenced the distribution mechanism of cinema, but also evinced an influx of money. The capital investment in cinema saw a steep rise with the rise of an upwardly mobile middle class, which also generated a middle-cinema that was between the political social realism movies and the popular “low-brow” cinema. Newer technological innovations like the Television brought in great changes in the arena of cinema of Kerala, in the 1980s. The spirit of poststructuralism and

postmodernism that rejected the grand narratives of yesteryears paved the path for globalization, privatization and economic liberalization. Cinema started getting emerged as a commodity that vouched for the popular and low brow culture. By the 1990s, with the introduction of Neo-liberalization policy by India, cinema morphed completely into a marketable product and actors emerged as commodities.

The post-1980s generation, referred here as ‘us’, are a unique lot. Our generation never had a serious unemployment crisis, a serious threat to our democracy as in 1975, or a serious war as in 1971. This in turn did not put us in vulnerable positions where we had to choose an ideology to stay afloat or make better sense of the world. We have spent most of our lives in a society where “Manmohanomics” have meant a good life for a good many of us. The primary principle of a “Manmohanomic” society is that be it voting against Iran or building new highways, you do not worry about principles but about the benefits. It is surprising that it makes sense to us, while a good number of people in our previous generations would have scoffed at the very idea of living without ideologies. (“The Mindspace”)

The pan-Indian multinational capitalist trap set by the 1991 Neo-Liberalization policy Kerala’s early political cinema, that stood strong against the populist star laden cinematic culture of Tamil and Telugu got lost in the din created by the market oriented cinematic culture, the roots of which could be traced to the middle cinema of the 1980s. The change in cinema from depicting social issues

to that of individual psyche and angst was a natural transition of the times. Popular cinema distributors and producers found a ripe market for melodrama and exploited the possibilities of the salability of the product. The transition was smooth and headed by filmmakers like Sathyan Anthikad, Sreenivasan, Renjith and Priyadarshan, in Malayalam. The themes of family and the female as the centripetal force dispersed new norms of societal being, through these films.

Popular fiction and women's magazines evolved as sources of cinema but the male hero was central to the plot and decisive in taking the action forward.

The 'classic' genres were constructed by recourse to masculine cultural values: gangster as tragic hero; the 'epic' of the West; 'adult' realism – while 'melodrama' was acknowledged only in those denigrated reaches of the juvenile and the popular, the feminized spheres of woman's 'weepie, the romance or the family melodrama. (Gledhill 34)

With the movement of the social to the psychic, the suffering individual and the system remained disconnected to each other. Songs, fight scenes and dramatic music with melodrama spiced up these individual oriented cinemas. The discourse that Malayalam cinema had generated for itself was washed out into the melodrama, in the liking of the Tamil and Telugu films. The 1980s also saw an unprecedented outpour of comedy films in Malayalam. Melodrama saw an unprecedented and unforeseen rise as a genre in Malayalam film industry. The materialistic attitude of the society, enforced by the Neo-Liberalization policy, reduced the thinking individual of the early period of Malayalam cinema, into a

personal cocoon, with personal and familial problems to be solved. The man-of-the-house character emerged with a responsible, family-oriented female cast.

The two, very strong, filmmakers of the era were Renjith and Priyadarshan, who are labelled as the two prominent schools in terms of production, by Prakash. Both these auteurs were outspoken about their attitudes regarding caste and class. These were against the emulation-worthy, policies of Kerala, as formulated by the Left government and poured water on centuries long struggle and revolution. Priyadarshan's character played by Mohanlal in the film *Aryan* (1988) is outspoken about the outdatedness of the revolutionary poem *Vazhakkula* by Vyloppally, the famous renaissance poet of Kerala. *Vazhakkula* is a poem about the casteist atrocities and an outcry against the heirarchy. This is just one instance of the destruction of the Kerala model of modernity that the Communsit government had ascertained through years of tremendous labour.

The Neo-Liberalized market used the portrayal of cultural artefacts of the feudal era to titillate the audience and introduced themes of neo-knighthood. Feudalism was ascertained to portray the larger-than-life characters in lead roles. The two actors – Mohanlal and Mammotty, emerged as superstars, due to the proven histrionic quality that they had showcased in the 1980s, with melodrama films that won over family audiences. A detailed analysis of the theories of films and its subsequent relevance in Malayalam cinema has to be made here.

When in it comes to the study of stardom in cinema, Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) are seminal volumes that form the base of such a study. The emergence of the actor as a star was an obvious product of

Capitalist consumerism. The commodity fetish in the star phenomenon could be best understood by the theories of star culture by Richard Dyer. Though Dyer has written two major books about the star phenomenon, his *Stars* is the book that could be applied to the Kerala context and aids the dissertation. Richard Dyer theorises the concept of stardom and says that the perception of the viewers about the stars heavily influence the film-viewing experience.

Dyer, through examining the construction of the star, through critical writings, magazines, advertisings and films unveil the construction of the star as a saleable commodity. “The star system lends itself particularly well to the manipulation thesis because of the enormous amount of money, time and energy spent by the industry in building up star images through publicity, promotion, fan clubs, etc” (12). The mechanism of capitalism that enhances consumerism through the self of the star is central to Dyer’s theory. This perspective extends on to his *Heavenly Bodies*.

The star as a capitalist product, according to Dyer, is visible on three levels – the star as a construction, as the equipment for financial gain and as representative of the dominant ideologies. By mentioning the star as a construction, Dyer refers to the image of the time and culture disbursed through the self of the star. Dyer says that the star reflects the cultural ideology and makes it a saleable commodity. The second point of star being an equipment for financial gain throws light on the nature of film as a commodity in the capitalist-consumerist market. Dyer refers to the market demand that produces stereotypical roles out of the star-actor.

Richard Dyer points to the cultural aspect of the times by referring to the ideologies that rule the market. He says that a star image is created in accordance with the values that increase consumption. This ideology depends upon the geographical and cultural location. In short, Dyer devices the identity of the star as a construction, commodity and ideology. Richard Dyer stresses on the relevance of the cultural, historical and ideological context behind the construction of a star image. This image, thus constructed, is done with market and subsequent consumption in mind. In *Stars*, Dyer comments: “Looking at the stars from the point of view of production puts the emphasis on the film-makers (including the economic structures within which they work and the medium they use) who make stars, or cause them to exist” (17).

The image of the star, according to Dyer in *Stars*, is what is created from the commercial arena that engages in materials and branding in relation to the star identity. “The myth of success also suggests that success is worth having - in the form of conspicuous consumption” (42). The branding associated with the stars, finally produce a statement that these fashions are to be emulated by the general public who have no position even near the stars. This helps in developing an affiliation that, indirectly, relates the fan to the life and ways of the star and the star, in person. The whole structure of the star system is essentially capitalist and promotes the exploitative labour structure that Marx refers to in his concern regarding a consumerist society.

Richard Dyer comments, in *Stars*, “Speaking of stardom as a ‘system’ involves understanding the ways in which the work of stars is influenced by the market of performance labour and the organisation of film production” (196).

The star as a manifest of a capitalist society is referred to in *Heavenly Bodies*, by Richard Dyer. “Stars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society” (5). Thus, Richard Dyer, is of the view that Stars communicate and carry ahead, the dominant ideologies of the times and conform to the social hegemony.

In order to analyse and understand the type of image ascribed to the male star in Malayalam cinema, the analysis of the guiding ideology for such representations need to be analyzed. *Men and Masculinities in South India* (2006) by Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella is a ground breaking monograph that has tried to analyse the construction of male identity in Kerala. This book delves deep into relationships, sexuality, religious practices, male friendships among other modes of expression in a society. The study found elements of Brahminical hierarchy in the general construction of a male ideology.

The fairly clear-cut picture that emerges ... is how the rituals are presented by Brahmins—as effecting one-off transformation within the person. The male person here, then, is unequivocally and essentially masculine—stripped of female birth pollution, set apart from domestic life and womenfolk, offered esoteric knowledge by senior menfolk, and subject to rituals available only to males. (Osella and Osella 35)

The projection of a normative household, in specific, and the society, in general, is designed around the Upper caste concepts of gender and social norms. An ideal male is the one upon the responsibility of the family is vested. The stars in the

capitalist film culture propagate a hegemonic masculinity based on Brahminical notions.

Hegemonic masculinity then is what all men aim for but not all achieve. Hegemonic masculinity is tied in with successful strategies for the subordination of women and with dominance over women and other (non-hegemonic) males, such as 'effeminate' men and boys. The significance of this is that performances of a male gendered self are not primarily enacted, repeated and reiterated before a critical audience of women, but rather oriented toward 'audiences' of significant men. The relations among men in all-male contexts are of critical importance to establish masculinity. (Osella and Osella 49)

The films of the prominent stars in Malayalam cinema, strictly adhere to the above said detailing and ideology in the representation of manhood, which extends to the status of hypermasculinity. The masculine hierarchies in the movies, of the neoliberal economy are based on mythical characters and images. This larger-than-life representation is used to build the star status, in the context of Malayalam movies. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

According to Richard Dyer's theory of the individual identity or differentiation of a star from another is very visible in the comparisons that run long in the case of Mohanlal and Mammooty.

They seem instead to embody different styles of hero and to have different types of appeal to audiences; sociologically, their fan bases trace

slightly different social groupings. We find that fans and casual watchers pick up many points of alleged contrast between the pair, such that we enter into an economy of a proliferation of difference and of dispersal of the star persona to cover a vast realm and to permit different audience groups to enter into relationships with the stars at different registers. (174)

The obsession of the fans for the stars is made clear by Osella and Osella in the following lines:

We are then thinking here not of identification but of temporary adoption and ‘trying on’—or, better, ‘taking in’—of characteristics, of partial and temporary incorporations into the self of such aspects as the smile, the walk, the deep voice. During film-watching and the subsequent ad hoc mimetic performances that take place within the group—reciting dialogues, acting out fights, singing songs—*payyans* are engaged in mimetic exchanges of characteristics with the stars, characteristics that are also then available to be detached from a particular hero and circulated within the wider group. (178)

The above lines show the height of consumption of the star image.

Osella and Osella in their ground-breaking work conclude the chapter on stardom in Malayalam cinema by referring the reconstruction of star images of ideal masculinity. This conclusion to the exhaustive study of the star statuses of Mohanlal and Mammooty is what could be seen in the new generation movies that came after the 2000s. The change does not, in any way, do away with the

central figure of the male in the family. The same hierarchical structures are represented in a different space and time, where the consumerist market pervades lives. “The Malayali young man reproduces and newly fashions over each generation and with each shift in masculine style what it means to be a Malayali man, negotiating the demands of modernity and finding a way to move through the various arenas—family, work, leisure— around him” (Osella and Osella 200).

In the context of Kerala, C.S. Venkiteswaran extends the concepts mentioned in *Men and Masculinities in South India*. In his seminal collection of essays, *Udalinte Tharasanchrangal* (2011), Venkiteswaran states that the market of the stars is determined by the constructed image of the stars and expectation of the fans, built upon the construction. Venkiteswaran says that the life of the fans is based upon the success and failure of the stars at the box office, to which the fans contribute greatly. Venkiteswaran, in the context of Kerala, asserts the distinguished identities maintained by Mohanlal and Mammooty, which are foils to each other but do not depict rivalry.

Mohanlal and Mammooty represent a transition in the Malayalam movie industry, from stardom to superstardom. Prem Nazir, the most popular actor before these two rose to prominence, was the representative of the naïve semi-urban society of Kerala in the time of independence. Major actors who came after Nazir, like Ratheesh, Sankar, Venu Nagavalli represented the struggles of the generation that came after independence, but did not rise to the stature of Nazir, Mohanlal and Mammooty in the 1990s far surpassed Nazir’s popularity and came to be crowned “Superstars”. Superstardom is an attribute of the age of postmodernity in the post-globalization era. Like all aspects of culture, in the

post-globalization era, movie stars, their movies and their ethos, their superstar/celebrity culture, all become commodities that are consumed widely in the society and that eventually define the society. The rise of Mohanlal and Mammooty also coincided with the rise of superstardom in Bollywood with the three Khans (following Amitabh Bachchan in the 1980s): Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan, as well as in Tamil cinema (Kollywood), with Rajnikanth, Kamal Haasan, Vijay and Ajith. The superstars were associated not only with skyrocketing popularity but also extremely high incomes. The superstar's image also went into the production and maintenance of an entire community of fans who variously showed countercultural tendencies, particular political affiliations, and even mania and mass hysteria, leading even to instances of suicide. Creation and maintenance of fan associations was often a business in itself, involving money and power, film awards, film publications and later television channels, all these often controlling the film industry completely.

Prior to the advent of the market-oriented cinema in Kerala, the State with a strong Leftist presence, was one the noted makers of the political Third Cinema. “Mohanlal and Mammooty, were known for rooted and realistic cinema at the beginning of their careers—with films like *Bharatham* (1991), *Devasuram* (1991) and *Amaram* (1991) standing out as examples—the period from the late 1990s to the early years of the 2000s was different for the Malayalam movie industry, and not pleasantly so” (Jha). The onset of the Consumerist ideology followed by various events like the fall of Soviet Russia brought a virtual end to the strong political undercurrent that gave birth to even stronger political movies. Production and distribution of such films were made extremely difficult due to

the centrifugal pressure of the consumerist market. The Mandal agitations, also, had changed the political debates on alter lines on a Pan-Indian canvas. The change of the medium from the celluloid to the electronic and digital formats changed the production and distribution mechanism, in Kerala, as well.

The blockbuster movies are unique propositions from a larger cultural perspective. These are celebrated movies which literally influence culture, spoken language, buying patterns, and even food habits, while at a more subtle level are entertaining reflections of what we think our main stream culture is. So, when I say a “Malayalam blockbuster”, I expect it to reflect what Malayalam is, to represent the malayali mainstream, or at least what we think Malayali mainstream is. A movie becomes a blockbuster when a significant majority of people watch it, and decide that this movie entertains them more compared to all other movies. Hence a blockbuster is an essentially democratic example of what entertains the majority of the population. (“The Mindspace”)

Global influence is not new in Kerala society in the post-1990s period. Keralites began to go to the countries of the Persian Gulf in large numbers following the boom in oil production in the early 1970s. This resulted in an increased affluence among the middle-classes in the State, followed by large-scale migration to other parts of India, the USA, Europe, and so on. The society and economy of Kerala has therefore depended on a global traffic of labour and money, which has reflected in the social, cultural and material developments in the State, as well as its cinema. Malayalam cinema, in contrast to its earlier politically aware films,

was in a state of confusion where mere aping of Bollywood, Tamil and Telugu industry happened.

Three formative news events of our lifetime came early in the 1990s – the collapse of Soviet Union and the liberalization of Indian economy, the Mandal quakes which spread naked the fault lines within us with vivid images like Rajiv Goswami burning, and the masjid coming down and the painful rise of the Indian terrorist. These events, each of them made the high earning, high spending, mostly upper caste Indian middle class redefine the way we approach the story of the human being right next to us. A classic example is the way we treat the “Polandine kurichu nee oraksharam mindaruthu” line from Sandhesham. Sreenivasan’s character tries to make the case saying human struggle is the same everywhere, but somehow it misses our collective consciousness. (“The Mindspace”)

The paradigms of “tradition” and “modernity” have always clashed in Malayalam cinema. While in the earliest films this was represented by the dichotomy between the rural peasant and the educated city-dweller, it also takes the form of the resident Malayali and the non-resident Indian, the older generation and the younger generation, and the upper-caste (Nair, usually) and the secular liberal. Thus, while the films of the late 1960s and 70s might have stereotyped the collective past of Kerala in terms of a generic peasantry rooted in village life, that “village” came to be identified with the space of the upper-caste Hindu (Nair). The expression of the dominant caste has also always been associated with its

notions of masculinity and patriarchy. As G. Arunima notes in the article “Matriliny and Its Discontents”:

As the cultural nostalgia is cast in distinctly masculine terms, so is the anxiety related to it. Memory here is often an act of gendered erasure, with Nayar women slowly and silently fading away in a world of masculine desire and intrigue. (qtd. in Lukose 927)

In the post-liberalization period, the whole of India, including Kerala, has witnessed the rise of the more politicized rightwing extremist ideology of Hindutva. In the book *Hindutva Rising: Secular Claims, Communal Realities* (2017), the Marxist thinker Achin Vanaik traces the rise of Hindu nationalism and the failure of Indian secularism to counter it. Vanaik argues that the wider Marxist community has always been an antidote to Hindu communalism.

The preoccupation with Hindu nationalism and caste has an uncanny connection with patriarchy even in the 21st century. In the article “The Many Misogynies of Malayalam Cinema,” Meena T. Pillai argues that male superstardom is the bane of Malayalam films. In her own words:

Kerala’s culture industry is written over by male desires, both economic and libidinal, and has become a superstructural expression of a reified capitalist patriarchy. It is also to a large extent today a commercial enterprise afflicted with varying degrees of mafiaisation, where the entertainment component displays a censored and censoring moral upper crust while the corrupt underbelly dips into less than licit businesses and

partnerships, including money laundering, hawala dealings, predatory moneylending, pimping, blackmail, extortions, and loansharking that would necessitate a nexus with gangsters. (52)

Pillai says this in the context of a sexual molestation case of a female actor in the public space in Kerala. She also relates the rise of stardom to liberalization:

Post-liberalization, when cinema metamorphosed from art to industry, creativity became saddled with notions of control and predictability. Market formulas emerged for the success of films. Organized production and standardized film types that tapped spectacle and stardom became a sure way of wooing large audiences. This synchronization of the ‘merchandise’ of cinema with an emerging consumerist capitalist culture was predicated on big budgets and maximizing profits. This was also the historic juncture when ‘the death of the director’ was staged.... The birth of the star occurred in parallel with this death of the director.... Post-1990, the rise of the ‘megastar’, ‘superstar’, and ‘people’s star’ consolidated the significance of glamour and spectacle in cinema. (53)

The importance of stardom in Malayalam cinema in the post-1990s era wandered away from the rigid socialist paradigms of earlier Malayalam cinema. The construction of new masculinist and capitalist conceptions of caste and gender that emerged, reinforced social hegemonies. Meena T. Pillai reminds us that the “New Wave” cinema of the 1970s had underplayed the myth of masculinity as

fragile and vulnerable. She cites Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Swayamvaram* (1972) and *Elipathayam* (1981), Aravindan's *Kanchana Sita* (1977), K.G. George's *Irakal* (1985) and *Adaminte Variyellu* (1983), and Padmarajan's *Peruvazhiyambalam* (1979) as examples. Pillai points out that this trend of defusing the myth of masculinity did not hold ground in the 1990s when the superstars like Mohanlal and Mammooty as well as others like Dileep ruled the industry.

The hegemonic power of stardom worked in more ways than one in Malayalam cinema. In the post-liberalization era, the megastars became owners and controllers of corporations. Associations for actors and technicians such as the Malayalam Cine Technicians' Association (MACTA) and the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) came into being in the 1990s. Such networks made Malayalam cinema pass into the hands of a small number of conglomerates and their partners. The fans associations brought to the superstar's reach the nature of a feudal empire. The managers of superstars became their producers and the stars were accessible only through these networks. The hegemonic power of such networks is exposed by Meena T. Pillai:

In 2009, MACTA accused the superstars, and especially Dileep, of scuttling its projects and applying pressure tactics to implement invisible expulsions and bans. In 2009, Thilakan, one of the most consummate of artists in Malayalam cinema, was expelled from AMMA on the grounds of indiscipline. Malayalam cinema witnessed one of the most shameful moments as star barons

decided the fate of artists through bans and ostracization. The mechanism of ostracism, whether perceived or real, seeks to install and stabilize a larger power network of illicit businesses, underworld stakeholders, corrupt politicians and human traffickers within the cinema industry. (54)

Another interesting point noted by Meena T. Pillai is that superstardom is attached to the concept of family. In other words, the stardom necessitated the portrayal of the star's secure family status and the apparent conjugal bliss of his wife. This adds to the star's ethnic masculinity and cultural value. Thus, the superstars, within and outside the films, serve to make patriarchy look natural and misogyny as invisible or innocuous. It follows that the misogyny of the stars and the characters they portray seem natural and inevitable to their masculinity. "...the late 1990s and early 2000s were a confused and complex phase of trial-and-error in Malayalam cinema, where nobody knew what was working and a lot of people were aping what was happening in the Tamil, Telugu and Hindi industries" (Jha).

However, Meena T. Pillai identifies a growing crisis of masculinity in post-1990s films, starting from Dileep films and becoming rampant in the new-generation films of the 21st century:

The competitive individualism which came in the wake of liberalization refuses traditional gender hierarchies and accentuated a crisis in masculinity.... This crisis is most obviously

revealed in Malayalam cinema where cinema simultaneously constitutes and reflects social history and social processes. (56)

The nuclear bourgeois family, which had been the central force of Kerala's modernity, was a major reason for reducing the feudal power of the patriarch. The increasing number of working women (both within and outside the films) and their new-found freedoms reformulated patriarchy and added to the masculine paranoia. Meena T. Pillai argues that Dileep's films make use of camp "as a subcultural reception strategy by which non-hegemonic masculinities can also be represented in mainstream culture in a humorous and non-threatening manner. Camp is a concept discussed by Susan Sontag in 1961: "The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious'" (277).

As much as masculinity, caste is also an undeniable presence in Malayalam cinema. Discourses on Dalit life and culture have found their space in Malayalam cinema since the 1970s. Dalit representations in cinema served to expedite the resistance against established power structures. Resmi G. and Anilkumar K.S. point out that from the first film in Malayalam *Vigathakumaran* (1928) to the 2018 film *Theevandi*, Malayalam cinema has failed to analyze deeply the political concept of caste and lacked the "courage" to powerfully delineate it (16). They assert that mainstream Malayalam films have dealt with the issue of caste very superficially, celebrating the demeaning portraits and genocides of the lower castes, Dalits and adivasis, and propagating upper caste Hindu patriarchal perspectives, their sole objectives being firmly rooted in the principles of consumerism.

Resmi and Anilkumar analyze the construction and propagation of a public consciousness in Malayalam cinema down to the post-liberalization era. Drawing from theoretical discussions of Popular Culture starting from Matthew Arnold in the 19th century down to the Marxist critics such as the Frankfurt School theorists Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson, they show how Malayalam cinema has consistently created a rhetoric of the upper castes as superior and the lower castes as inferior and savage. Innumerable popular films like *Oru Vadakkan Veeragadha* (1989), *Perunthachan* (1990), *Pazhassi Raja* (2009), *Odiyan* (2018), and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (2018) are examples. They also show how films have at large “naturalized” the dramatic discriminations and inequalities of the society based on homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and so on (17).

The complexities, diversities and contradictions of human life thus get reduced to stereotypes that become the foundation of the public consciousness. Through such stereotypes, the black-skinned lower classes are perpetually portrayed as “criminals”, homosexual people as “unnatural”, transpeople as “criminals” and sex workers, adivasis as savage, Muslims as religious extremists, Tamil, Bengali and other-State workers as “dangerous”. Mainstream Malayalam cinema thus transmits and propagates a “Hate culture” which lead to moral policing, mob lynching, and so on. The apolitical masses who are consumers of such films thus turn into the advocates of a fascist culture (18).

Islamophobia has grown to fearful proportions as a result of Westernization and liberalization in the post-1990s. In complete rejection of the progressive and liberal values of the 1970s and 80s, Malayalam films of the

1990s have depicted Muslim characters as comic monstrosities and anti-heroes. Resmi and Anilkumar have discussed Malayalam film critics like G.P. Ramachandran, C.S. Venkiteswaran, N.P. Sajeesh, and K.P. Jayakumar who have analyzed the growing Islamophobia in Malayalam cinema starting from *Dhruvam* (1992, Joshiy). The examples of such characters would include Hyder (*Dhruvam*, Tiger Prabhakar), Pookoya (*Sphadikam*, Sreeraman), Yousuf Sha (*Ustad*, Rajeev), Mayambram Bava (*Valyettan*, N.F. Varghese), Khalid Muhammed (*C.I.D. Moosa*, Sharat Saxena), Hyderali (*Bharatchandran I.P.S.*, Sai Kumar), Basheer (*Balettan*, Vimal Raj), Babu (*Baba Kalyani*, Indrajit), and Cherklakkaran Kaikka Kader (*Pulimurugan*, Sudheer Karamana).

The myth of Hindu-Muslim enmity in India which came into being due to machinations of the British in the colonial times, reached its zenith in the Partition. The Hindutva campaign that the Muslim rulers of India were cruel and unfair fanned the Islamophobic emotions, finding its culmination in the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on Dec 6, 1992. Islamophobia world over reached its peak in the 9/11 terrorist attack on World Trade Centre in New York City in 2001. In this context, the “Indian Muslim” is faced with the challenge of establishing his/her identity within the national discourse.

In the post-1990s, we find dichotomous meanings within the discourse of the Muslim, such as Indian Muslim/Pakistani Muslim, good Muslim/bad Muslim, patriot/anti-national, and so on which find expression in Malayalam films like *F.I.R.* (1999), *Dada Sahib* (2000), *Praja* (2001), *Kilichundan Mambazham* (2003), *Keerthichakra* (2006), and *Kurukshetra* (2008). Muslims are ridiculed as contemptible comic characters who are crude, cheap, greedy and religious

fanatics in films like *Kireedom* (1989), *Malappuram Haji Mahanaya Joji* (1994), *Udayapuram Sulthan* (1999), *Pranayanilavu* (1999), *Sharja to Sharja* (2001), *Kilichundan Mambazham* (2003), *Salpperu Ramankutty* (2004), *Indian Rupee* (2011), *Amar Akbar Anthony* (2015), *Aadu Oru Bheekarajeeviyanu* (2015), *Fukri* (2017), and so on. Humour in these films is created around the northern dialect of Malayalam spoken by these characters, their short, stout bodies, the practice of circumcision, polygamy, sodomy, black magic and superstition, and vulgar, stereotypical words and expressions are repeatedly used to denote them.

Another stereotype related to that of the Muslim is that of the Arab or the “Gulf Malayali”. Even as the Arab and the Gulf countries remained the source of hope and wealth for the Keralites of the middle and lower classes, the Arab and the Gulf Malayali have been depicted as stupid, lusty, arrogant and the butt of ridicule in the films of the late 20th century, especially the 1980s. The dreams, struggles and achievements of the Gulf Malayali were often a spectacle, and denied a respectable treatment. The bus company owner in *Varavelppu* (1989, Mohanlal), the ridiculous bridegroom in *Pulival Kalyanam* (2003, Salim Kumar), “Persiakkaran Kamalasanan” who has gone to Bombay with Gulf-aspirations and returned with the “Persian-look” in *Venicile Vyapari* (2011, Salim Kumar), and “Gulfan Shibu” who attempts to marry the heroine in *Talsamayam Oru Penkutty* (2012, Suraj) are all examples of the comic depictions of the Gulf Malayali. In the 2000s, however, when the upper class Malayalis also began to migrate to the Gulf countries, this has somewhat changed and the Gulf countries have begun to be depicted as analogous to the USA or Europe in films like *Diamond Necklace*, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam*, and so on.

We cannot imagine our country as a third world spokesperson as in the times of Nehru-Indira, despite having the highest number of poor people in the world. This shift also resulted in the much vocal consumer class in Kerala redefining what they accepted as their own story. In a very swift time frame, the Pajeros and Audis that Mohanlal drive around in his movies became our story despite the cruel hand of the much constant per capita income, and stories of the dalits and the Muslims and the socially marginalized became foreign to us – some of us sometimes visit those foreign concepts in film festivals. This selective alienation of stories that were part of us, and a collective exodus to the stories around the not-even-rich consumerist class could eventually deliver us into the hands of a situation they speak about in the movie *Fight Club*, when the things that you own start to own you, and around you is a wasteland of values. When a society's biggest dream is an eight-lane highway where it can further enhance its addiction to imported oil, it might soon find itself in the midst of other societies that forsake ideology – in a wasteland of values. (“The Mindspace”)

Before and after the liberalization era, there has been a persistent discourse of “blackness” in Malayalam cinema that was deeply entrenched in the public consciousness of the average Malayali. While dark skin designated lower social status, criminality, dirt and danger, fair skin denoted superiority, decency, dignity, innocence and grandeur. Black skin, along with obesity, “ugly” looks

and lack of power have been great reasons for generating laughter and for projecting stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. This is not a peculiar aspect of Malayalam cinema, but an extension of the consciousness of Indian cinema itself. This discourse of blackness is related to our notions of caste and race, and to the deep-lying feudal impressions in our social imaginary.

In Malayalam cinema, the dark skin-white skin dichotomy gave rise to hero-supporting actor pairs from the 1980s up to the present-day such as Mohanlal-Sreenivasan, Mukesh-Sreenivasan, Jayaram-Kalabhavan Mani, Dileep-Salim Kimar, Mammooty-Shajohn, Dulquer Salman-Jacob Gregory, and so on, where the second name in the pair invariably denotes the powerless, ridiculous “Other”. The commercial films thus generate fear, contempt and disgust with the dark-skinned person, effectively dividing the society into the good, fair-skinned, upper class, heroic mainstream and the dark, despicable, worthless margins. Dark-skinned actors like Sreenivasan who rose to be a renowned screenplay writer, director and also donned the role of hero in some popular films, the winners of the National Award for Best Actor (Rajat Kamal) such as Salim Kumar (2010) and Suraj Venjarammoodu (2013), supporting actors who won the State Award for the Best Actor such as Vinayakan (2016), Indrans (2017) and Soubin Shahir (2018) have all initiated a counter-discourse to the hegemonic superiority of the white skin that dominated Malayalam cinema.

The dark-skinned female bodies have, from the beginnings of Malayalam cinema, been that of lower class/caste maid servant or rural labourer representing an overly sexual objectification. Early films like *Nellu*, *Chemmeen*, *Neelathamara*, *Thakara*, *Parangimala*, and so on are cases in point. The dark

females in these films were half-dressed, exposing their voluptuous bodies, and depicted as fallen, love/sex-crazy, seductive, easily available and even as the object of love betrayal or rape.

The villainous characters in Malayalam cinema are also mostly dark-skinned and represent the “Other”. Such characters include goons, slum-dwellers, anti-socials and people of lower castes or other States. The antagonist Kalakeya and his team in *Bahubali the Beginning* (2015), for instance, are all dark-skinned. The people hunted by S.I. Biju Poulse in *Action Hero Biju* (2016) are also dark. The people from slums or colonies who fight for their freedom and rights in films like *The King* (1995), *Aaram Thampuran* (1997), *Bharatchandran I.P.S.* (2005), and so on are also dark and far beyond the middle-class notions of beauty.

The Tamil anti-heroes of films like *Kanmadam* (1998), *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* (1998), *Satyameva Jayate* (2001), *Rajamanikyam* (2005), *Pandippada* (2005), *Neram* (2013), *Adi Kapyare Koottamani* (2015), *Aadu 2* (2017) are dark-skinned and disturb the Malayali conceptions of family and social order. The phobia against the Tamilians and the Bengali labourers in Malayalam films reveal the hypocritical subconscious of the Kerala society that nurtures feudal ideas of caste and class. Tamil characters have been tirelessly insulted and ridiculed in order to make Malayali society seem better and good in films like *Melepparampil Aanveedu* (1993), *Narendran Makan Jayakanthan Vaka* (2001), *Rasathantram* (2006), *Annan Thampi* (2008), *Cousins* (2014), *Aravindante Athithikal* (2018), and so on.

Kerala's xenophobic distrust of the Bengali migrant labourers started with the murder of Perumbavoor Jisha in 2017. This incident fostered the rising belief that these migrants are all drug-addicts and criminals. Thus, Bengali anti-heroes and comic characters began to appear in films like *Masala Republic* (2014), *Om Santhi Osana* (2014), *Oru Vadakkan Selfie* (2015), *Aan Maria Kalippilanu* (2016), *Aadu 2* (2017), and so on. Along with the people from "other States", Africans and white Westerners also have appeared as villains and untrustworthy characters. The character Bruno in *Aanaval Mothiram* (1991) is an early example and *Escape from Uganda* (2013) a recent one. Xenophobia in Malayalam films also extend to landless gypsies, beggars, circus workers and all types of poor people of which *Kabuliwala* (1993) is an instance.

The xenophobia and paranoia towards the "Other" are unmistakably the agenda of the Hindutva notion of a Hindu Rashtra which regards Muslims, Christians, Pakistanis, refugees, migrants and all types of "foreigners" as dispensable in the nation. And, as discussed earlier, the ideology of Hindutva is hand-in-hand with liberalization. The social media which is the hallmark of the era of globalization is the most powerful vehicle of any ideology, including Hindutva, and it is widely acknowledged that the BJP's second-time landslide win in India in 2019 is at least partly the result of carefully coordinated online marketing and promotion.

The impact of the neo-liberal policies on the overall lifestyle and thoughts of Kerala society grew more into a consumeristic pattern by the wake of the twenty-first century. People who moved to the cities in the previous decade to work in multinational companies started getting engaged in not only in

consumption but production of cinema, as well. This happened mainly due to the pervading of technology in the everyday life. The redundancy and limitations of the feudal artefacts saw a gradual and systematic disappearance from the scene of commercial Malayalam cinema. The popularization and democratization of film festivals, availability of CDs, DVDs (illegal market as well) opened the space of production and other forms of participation to a generation who started making films with relatable content. The camera moved from the ancestral houses, ponds and festivities of feudal celebration to the streets of the cities – both the ultra glamourized spectacle of consumerism and the shady pocket roads.

By 2010, the old school of Malayalam cinema had morphed completely out of a single-star super hero film into multi-starrer movies that organized spectacles. Newer films that entered the scene were content-driven and aided by international ethos of film making. Language, space, diegesis, narration, all changed drastically towards 2010. The first decade of the twentieth century was the germination period of the newer wave of cinema in Malayalam. Commercial possibilities of the global market were another primary factor that dictated movies of the twenty first century. Capitalist ideology of the new generation movies stimulated an unforeseen commodity fetish that was accessible across classes. Actors, directors and producers who engaged in the earlier hyper-masculine feudal movies changed their perspectives and adapted to the overtly consumerist-capitalist ideology of the new generation films. Select representative films of the new generation category will be analyzed in detail in the third chapter, for the consumerist capitalist ideology.

The last few decades of the twentieth century saw a major shift in the consumerist ideology of Malayalam cinema. This was in the form of the city as a way of interpreting and comprehending the pertinent historical shifts in society. Even in movies that didn't deal with city as a physical space, representation in terms of the effect of urban culture and its extension on to other spaces ruled the diegesis of Malayalam cinema. Family as a space of merger of the public and private spheres found constant representation in Malayalam films, across years. Thus, as Hindutva and fundamentalist ideas of social life continue to flourish in our midst, it has become imperative to generate discussions on Malayalam cinema in the context of liberalization and globalization. These discussions could point to the basic aspects of our existence and survival in the coming years and could signal positive changes in our artistic and cinematic expression for a better future. Hence, this dissertation, "Ideological Underpinnings in Select Malayalam Commercial Films of the Post-Liberalization Era" proposes to study select films from the 1990s up to the present day.

The next chapter will look into the concept of superstardom in Malayalam cinema and how the commodity fetish overtook the industry by closely analyzing four movies released between 1990 and 2000. Based upon the Marxist concepts of commodity fetish and the theories of star image, globalization and capitalism, discussed in this chapter, the next chapter will look into how capitalism used feudal artefacts, while opposing the system of Feudal modes of production, and generated a commodity fetish around commercial movies and the star personas, by using a comprehensive approach around the various visual media. The II chapter will delve deep into the larger-than-life superstar persona to get to the

roots of the commodity fetish. The ideologies of market economy and production that underlies the hegemonic structure will be discussed in the light of the superstar identities of two famous male actors – Mohanlal and Mammotty, of Malayalam cinema, who ruled the roost in the 1990s.

Chapter Two

Neo-Feudal Reversion

In *Celluloid* (2013), a biopic made on the life of J.C. Daniel, the father of Malayalam cinema, there is a scene where Daniel's son wakes from a nap, from inside a bus, by hearing loud celebrations that accompany the film-box of the popular flick *Narasimham*. An over-crowded cinema theatre with large cut-outs of Mohanlal with garlands on it and cine-lovers raising slogans to the grandeur of their favourite star, Mohanlal, is the scene that J.C. Daniel's son witnesses on his way to an award function posthumously honouring J.C. Daniel, after a long period of neglect. This scene of release of *Narasimham* is used in *Celluloid* to mark the passage of time, as well as a huge change that had come upon Malayalam cinema – the rise of the superstar era. It is the sudden change that the Neo-liberalized economy had brought into Malayalam cinema that is precisely depicted in *Celluloid*.

The 1990s woke up to a consumerist trend in Malayalam cinema that was earlier known for its strong political films. The movies that followed saw hyper masculinities masquerading the silver screen. The rise of the superstar as a commodity and the fetish around the construction are the most prominent features of Malayalam cinema, released after the 1990, when Indian economy had opened its markets to the global business. The post 1990s cinema in India was the product of the political and economic system that was brought forth due to the phenomenon of Neo-Liberalization and Globalization. The manifestation of the

change, when compared to the pre 1990s scenario, especially, in the context of Kerala, was massive. This swept off the strong political cinema that was the face of Kerala.

The history of Left-wing political renaissances, rise of middle cinema and finally the mass entertaining mainstream cinema was a continuation that sprung up from the respective political ideologies of the ages. These movies have also influenced the social sensibility of the Malayalis in innumerable ways. This chapter analyses the superstar phenomenon in Malayalam cinema of the 1990s, using the concepts of star theory. A Marxist analysis is employed to understand how Capitalism employs feudal artefacts to enhance consumerism. This chapter attempts to elucidate elements that create the commodity fetish around the Capitalist construction and promotion of the Superstar image, using feudal artefacts. This chapter adopts the idea of “Mohanlal and Mammooty era” because they could be seen as metonymically representing the era. Like the figures of Wordsworth and Coleridge tower over the Romantic period and cannot be separated from the cultural imaginary of that period, Mohanlal and Mammooty are representatives of the age. This was an age when the towering images of these superstars dominated over the Malayali psyche in multiple ways and defined identities and sensibilities.

For almost 50 years since independence, Kerala had undergone developments in leaps and bounds due to the influence of Renaissance movements in Kerala (which started in the nineteenth century but continued up to the 1970s during which time there was the demise of social leaders like Sahodaran Ayyappan, K. Kelappan, Mannathu Padmanabhan, V.T.

Bhattathiripad and A.K. Gopalan), the spread of Communism, Christian missionaries and convent education, the “Gulf boom” and resulting affluence and real estate boom, industrialization, and increasing Westernization. It can be legitimately claimed that by the 1990s, Kerala became the most capitalist, urbanized, educated, intellectual and political community in India. The evidence to this is found in the high rates of consumerism, high standards of healthcare, literacy and education, salaried jobs, vehicle use, cell phone use and so on. The state of agricultural neglect and industrial void in Kerala made it an essentially consumerist state. With cent percentage literacy and people going for jobs befitting their educational qualifications, only white-collar jobs were preferred by a great majority. Towards the end of the 1990s, the phenomenal growth of the IT industry in Kerala and other States led to great changes in youth culture. Because of the campus recruitments into the Multinational companies and people earning even in their early 20s, the spending habit of youngsters, in specific, and the whole population, in general, saw a spike. These reflected on the increasing consumerism in Kerala society at this time, and the rise of malls and multiplexes.

The unprecedented fast-paced changes that Kerala witnessed did not have a smooth passage. There was a constant clash between the old and new in Kerala society, which shook the foundations of family life and social relationships, and led to higher rates of mental illnesses, divorce and suicide, and erosion of religious and traditional moral values on the one hand and the growth of god-men and god-women on the other. While Mohanlal represented the new generation youth in his struggle for a job and stability, rebellion against the Establishment, and a playful and humorous attitude to life, and a clash with the

old generation, Mammooty represented the nostalgic values of the now-disappearing patriarchal family, the images of which Kerala society still clung to in its desperate search for stability and security.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003) criticizes this tendency to define and develop culture in economic terms, and categorizes the above-said developments in the film industry as part of what he calls the “Bollywoodization” of the Indian film industry. He asserts:

Bollywood is not the Indian film industry, or at least not the film industry alone. Bollywood admittedly occupies a space analogous to the film industry, but might best be seen as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio. If so, the film industry itself—determined here solely in terms of its box office turnover and sales of print and music rights, all that actually comes back to the producer—can by definition constitute only a part, and perhaps an *alarmingly small part*, of the overall cultural industry that is currently being created and marketed. (Rajadhyaksha 27; emphasis in original)

Malayalam mainstream cinema and its superstardom have undoubtedly been influenced by Bollywood and Kollywood, all under the umbrella of Globalization and Liberalization, to be specific.

The technological advancement of the film is directly proportional to the process of creation of stardom. Hence, Satyan from the black and white era

didn't emerge as a star, while in the age of colour, Nazir became a star and in the age of cinemascope, multicolour and DTS, Mammooty and Mohanlal became superstars. The technological excellence of film gives the medium a greater hand in manipulating and molding the spectators' mind and thoughts. The rise of communications technology and the social media has played a crucial role in these changes in the film industry. According to Sherwin Rosen (1981), superstardom in the arts is due to two factors: a hierarchy of talent, and the perfect or nearly perfect reproducibility of art. The digital revolution led to the massive reproduction of films and film songs, from VHS cassettes to CDs, DVDs, YouTube and other websites, and now in mp4 and other formats.

Moshe Adler (1985), however, does not agree that superstardom is based on talent alone. He rightly points out that there could be many actors who possess high quality talent required of superstars, but what produces superstars is the consumers' need to be part of a huge community that consumes the same art. This is analogous to the popularity of branded products which might sell more even though qualitatively superior products in the markets might sell less. In other words, what creates a superstar is mostly branding, positioning and public relations. This need of the consumer that Adler discusses arises from the fact that the consumption of any work of art is not the experience of a moment but a dynamic process that forms part of a larger social belonging and identity.

Superstardom is analogous to the consumer products in that both have to maintain the same nature and quality to be consumed repeatedly. The consumable qualities of the superstar (voice, mannerisms, nature of the body, style) and his suitability to certain roles and characters are essential attributes of

his superstardom which contribute to the expectations of the star in the minds of the consumers which cannot be changed easily in any role. This is true of branded products also.

Superstardom was also based on a monopolistic masculine dominance in the industry. Female actors and characters were almost invariably sidelined as secondary in movies as well as in the industry. It also followed that the superstar movies moved away from themes of love and domesticity and engaged increasingly with violence, crime and the underworld. This transition is discernible in the Mohanlal and Mammooty movies of the 1980s through the 1990s.

After globalization, corporatization has changed every aspect of Indian society, including the film industry. The nature of production and distribution of movies changed, and the market mechanism changed drastically. This will be dealt, in detail, in the next chapter.

The actor is an individual, but the star is a construct. The creation of a superstar involves three parameters: the actor, the spectators and the marketing of the image of the superstar. It is because of the third element that all good actors do not become superstars. In the creation of stardom, the role of the actor and his personality is of course of great importance. There will be always some aspect of the actor's personality that contributes to his superstardom. For Amitabh Bachchan, it is voice, for Rajnikanth it is acting style, for Arnold Schwarzenegger it is his physique. For Mohanlal it is his naturalness / ordinariness of acting. Mohanlal's acting is rooted in personation and is naturalistic. He employs a

variation of the Stanislavski method or system, which is a set of techniques used by actors to portray emotions on stage by putting themselves in the place of the character. The ability to project himself into the character gave Mohanlal the immense range and variety that is characteristic of his career. The diverse characters that Mohanlal played on screen are representatives of the period and the society in many ways. Alternately, these immensely popular characters have also shaped the sensibility of the Kerala society in multifarious ways. In this way, Mohanlal arguably has a secure position in Kerala history for having had an active role in shaping Malayali sensibilities in the post-globalization era.

The characters played by Mohanlal have developed over some recognizable stereotypes. First, Mohanlal played the role of villains as in the early movies *Manjil virinja pookkal* (1980, screenplay and direction Fazil) and *Madrasile Mon* (1982, screenplay P.M. Nair, direction J. Sasikumar). Then he turned to comedy of which significant are director Priyadarshan's movies: *Poochakkoru mookkuthi* (1984), *Boeing Boeing* (1985), *Mazha Peyyunnu Maddalam Kottunnu* (1986), *Chithram* (1988), *Vandanam* (1989), *Kilukkam* (1991), *Mithunam* (1993), *Thenmavin Kombath* (1994), and so on. The protagonists in these movies struggle to make both ends meet and survive, they are very practical and often indulge in some small fraud or treachery, unlike the characters often played by Mammooty, who are men of integrity fighting for some ideal, never touched by negative anti-social elements, triumphing or losing at the end. Director Fazil's box-office hit *Manichithrathazhu* (1993) is a deadly mix of comedy and psychological thriller and brought other major directors of Malayalam Siddique-Lal, Priyadarshan and Sibi Malayil into its fold. This movie

is one among the top thrillers in Malayalam and in the entire Indian film industry. However successful the protagonist is, he is ordinary and eccentric, a very intelligent genius, a character whose development is similar to that of the protagonist in another Mohanlal-starrer *Ayal Katha Ezhuthukayanu* (1998).

The third stint in his career (which overlaps with the former) was when Mohanlal played the unemployed young man of our neighbourhood in the movies directed by Sathyan Anthikad, with screenplay by Sreenivasan. These include *T.P. Balagopalan MA* (1986), *Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhanam* (1986), *Gandhi Nagar 2nd Street* (1986), *Nadodikkattu* (1987), *Pattanapravesham* (1988) and *Varavelpu* (1989). The stereotype of the unemployed young man offered a truthful image of the post-independence generation of Malayali youth who had college and university education but struggled to get jobs and make a living. The value of employment was no longer a highlight in post-globalization era. The unemployed young man image was coupled with some kind of tomfoolery and fraud as in *Chithram*, or an unfulfilled love affair and fight against injustice and villainy as in director Sibi Malayil's *Kireedam* (1989). In a later Sathyan Anthikad movie, *Innathe Chintha Vishayam* (2008), Mohanlal plays the role of an unemployed garment-exporter who is reasonably wealthy, with a lot of spare time to devote for five women and solve the problems in their lives. This change from the unemployed young man leading a frustrating life of failure to a man who patronizes and indulges in a Good Samaritan role can be regarded as a change caused by globalization, to which the Gulf Dream had contributed massively. The unemployed young man's struggles to preserve his integrity took other forms in Sibi Malayil movies such as *Doore Doore Oru Koodu Koottam*

(1986), *Kireedam* and *Dasaratham* (both of 1989), *His Highness Abdulla* (1990), *Bharatham* (1991), *Kamaladalam* (1992) and so on. The predictable formula of humour-psychological intensity-social commentary applied to a young man's life takes on new dimensions in the movie *Vietnam Colony* (1992) made on the screenplay of writers-directors duo Siddique-Lal. This movie also highlights the positive capacity of a negative character to change.

In the 1990s, Mohanlal did two popular movies where he played the role of a leftist politician, *Lal Salam* (1990) and *Rakthasakshikal Sindabad* (1998). Here also the stereotype of the negative character who undergoes a transformation is repeated. He always stands against the mainstream. This was also the time when he did a few movies where he represented the typical stereotype of the Gulf-Malayali, in movies like *Nadodikkattu* (1987) and *Varavelpu* (1989). While *Nadodikkattu* is a satire on the Gulf-dreams of the average Malayali, the movie *Varavelpu* depicts the corrupt socio-political system of Kerala. Before the era when Mohanlal acted in *Nadodikkattu*, upper class Malayali men were not at large migrating to the Gulf for jobs. It was after the Neo-Liberalization policy was implemented that the yesteryear feudal landlords and people from other higher echelons in the society started moving to the Gulf, in search of white-collar jobs. The Gulf Malayalis before this era were low class, uneducated labourers mostly represented by comic actors like Kuthiravattom Pappu (in *Amina Tailors*, 1991). Later in *Devasuram* (1993), Mangalasseri Neelakantan insults the Gulf-Muslim Beerankutty who offers to buy his land: “*Etho naattil poyi naalu puthen undakkiyente negalippu Mangalasseri Neelakantanodu kanikkukaya?*” [Trying to flaunt your paltry earnings from some

forsaken lands before Mangalasseri Neelankantan?]] (Qtd. from film, my trans.). Gulf-characters in these early movies were the butt of ridicule, being cheap show-offs. Mohanlal's character Dasan (for Ramdas) in *Nadodikkattu* brought a big change in the depiction of Gulf-Malayalis, which reflected the change in the Malayali psyche. Upper class / caste Malayalis began to think of Gulf countries as a covetable career option at this time. While the *Nadodikkattu* characters dream of migrating to the Gulf, the Mohanlal-character in *Gandhi Nagar Second Street* finally ends up in the Gulf.

Director Padmarajan's movies starring Mohanlal are disturbing and disruptive of expectations. *Namukkuparkkan Munthirithoppukal* (1986) and *Thuvanathumbikal* (1987) are the two major cases in point. Both these have shocked spectators out of their conventional notions of morality and sexuality. While movies had hitherto presented the heroine as virginal, Solomon in the first movie accepts a rape victim as his life partner. Before this movie, such a raped woman would end up at the end of a rope or be condemned to lifelong loneliness and seclusion from society. *Thuvanathumbikal* also was a movie that presented sexuality from a woman's perspective and destroyed the complacent conservatism of the Malayali spectators. Though movies that gave a freehand to women (such as Kamal's *Manju pole oru Penkutti*, 2004) have been ruthlessly rejected by the Kerala public, both these movies, surprisingly, were box-office hits. The role of Mohanlal in endearing unpalatable themes to Kerala society is undeniable.

Thuvanathumbikal dramatizes the fantasies of the male spectator. The hypocritical Malayali male is attracted to the unconventional and bold identity of

the male protagonist as well as the double life he leads. While he is a strict and arrogant miser who haggles for a single paisa at home, with his friends in the city he is lavish in spending money and even arranges a woman for a friend. Clara, the sexy woman character who stole the hearts of the protagonist and thousands of Malayali men, but ultimately disappears from the protagonist's life, leaving him to the security of a conventional marriage, is perhaps an embodiment of the sexual desires of the average Malayali man.

The period of Mohanlal's career that is of interest in this chapter is the next, the time when he played the role of a young man from a feudal culture. The period of globalization and liberalization, arguably, ushered in an era of neo-feudalism, as evidenced by these movies. Neo-feudalism is a term used in economics and refers to a social system where the rich people and the corporations control all socio-political processes and governments, and where commercial interests dominate the social processes. In the age of globalization and neo-imperialist capitalism, the neo-feudal tendencies denote that the corporations have a ruling power over the people that is similar to that of the government of a State. The terms "neo-feudalism" and "neo-conservatism" have been applied to twenty-first century American society in conjunction with the criticism of America's crony capitalism.

The term "Neo-feudalism" was first proposed in 1961 by American economist John Kenneth Galbraith in 1961 (Kyrchanov 4) and in the 1990s, Immanuel Wallerstein popularized the term. It was in 2013 that the demographer Joel Kotkin analyzed the situation of the USA in his book *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Middle Class* (2013) and argued that America,

especially California, was slipping into a state of neofeudalism. According to him, California, once a dream-city of the middle class, has become divided into four classes: the oligarchs (the super-wealthy, especially in technology and finance), the clergy (government regulators, the media elite, and the academy), the yeomanry (the middle class and small-business owners), and the serfs (the working poor and government dependants). Kotkin's idea of Neo-feudalism became quite popular among sociologists and economists and led to many deliberations.

Italian Marxist historians Ruggiero Romano and Rosario Villari have talked about "refeudalization", a concept influenced by Gramsci's ideas. This term refers to the process of recovering mechanisms and relationships that are considered to be features of Feudalism. Romano and Villari applied this term primarily to the seventeenth century, in the context of the Neapolitan Revolt of 1647. A Hungarian professor of sociology, Erzebet Szalai has argued that this concept can be applied to global capitalism. In her article "Refeudalization" published in *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Polity*, she shows that refeudalizing processes are immanent features of new capitalism, and radical changes in geopolitical, geoeconomic equilibrium that results from globalization entail more marked, authoritarian endeavours.

An analysis of the globalized society and the films of the 1990s as part of this research project led to the realization that there are elements of feudalism in these movies, in plot construction, characterization and treatment. The concept "Neo-feudalism" seems an appropriate platform to study the elements of feudalism and capitalism in these films. The sudden changes in economy and

culture that liberalization and globalization brought about in the Kerala society led to huge divides between the young and the old, the urban and the rural, and the rich and the poor. The farmers and labourers and the rural poor became poorer and more exploited, as traditional occupations and values disappeared. This is reminiscent of the state of Umoufia, the village of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) when colonialism brought about irreversible and destructive changes to the people.

Neo-feudalism in the wake of globalization has resulted in massive inequalities and injustices due to neo-colonization by corporates and due to the surge of rightist attitudes the world over. There has been since the 1990s a deeper fragmentation of the working classes and a re-concentration of land in the hands of land owners, capitalists and corporations. This was also the time when India fell back on a celebration of a neo-traditional “Indianness” and patriotism. Feudalistic tendencies and caste Hindutva ideologies in the society are re-enacted in the movies of this time in both Bollywood as well as the regional cinemas of the country, including Malayalam cinema. Regarding the inherent ideologies of the superstar movies, Richard Dyer, in *Stars*, comments:

The enormous economic importance of the stars, the elaborate machinery of image-building and film’s importance in establishing character-types all suggest the potential power of the forces of cinematic production for creating the star phenomenon. However, these explanations of the star phenomenon are not sufficient in themselves, and we need to see the phenomenon in its cultural, historical and ideological context to understand where the

producers' ideas and images of stardom and of specific stars themselves come from. (17)

The Mohanlal starrers of the 1990s unmistakably depict feudal societies. Here a so-called traditional culture, the power of moneyed people, patriarchal family structures, corrupt bureaucracy and the naturalization of fighting and warfare rule the roost. In some of the movies of this period, the Mohanlal-character is in open rebellion against a domineering father, as in *Spadikam* (1995). This character developed into a neo-feudal lord *Devasuram* (1993) and gained popularity through *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997), *Narasimham* (2000), *Ravana Prabhu* (2001), *Thandavam* (2002), and so on. This neo-feudal lord stoically hides a troubled past (especially in connection with his father) as in *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran*, and protects his dependants at the expense of his own life and comforts. This phase of Mohanlal's career, as discussed above, coincided with the era of globalization in Kerala.

The pre-1980s era had a solid political background of constant struggle against the feudal landlords. This was aided by the government policies of the first government in Kerala. The Land Reform Bill and other policies regarding the upliftment of women, lower classes and castes provided strong resistances, causing the establishment of Socialism, which was upturned by the market forces that had been growing, covertly, in the Indian soil, like everywhere else in the world. The fall of Soviet Russia was a very important reason for these. The 1980s films of Mohanlal and Mammotty, inspite of carrying feudal vestiges did not feature larger-than-life scenario. That was a phase when these regressive concepts

were interpellated by film makers with strong casteist beliefs, like Priyadarshan, Renjith and Sathyan Anthikad.

Always in such times of upheavals, across the world, there have emerged some safety-valves that enable the society to let out its frustrations. In Europe, take the Renaissance period, for instance. The Renaissance was the time when modernity in the guise of classical capitalism was born out of the ashes of feudalism. The social consciousness of the era was first reflected in the popular arts and entertainments of the time, such as drama and poetry. Another period of upheaval in Britain was the late eighteenth century, when industries began to be established, eventually leading to the birth of industrial societies and urbanity. Romantic poetry reflected the changes of this time. The Romantics like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats turned away from modern rationalist scientism and embraced medievalism, paganism and nature. The modernist movement in Europe was a reaction to the World War and its resultant social upheavals. Modernist writers like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce turned to ancient mythology in order to “give a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history” (Eliot 177).

Along these lines, I would state that the neo-feudal movies of Mohanlal offer a reaction to the confusions and uncertainties of the era of globalization and liberalization. The heroes of these movies look back at the past of Kerala and nostalgically represent the power of the “chekavans” (a warrior class) of the “Vadakkan Veeragadhas” (Northern Folktales of Heroism). Like the chekavans, these heroes are self-righteous and mentally invincible, they can fight hundreds of people singlehandedly, they are devoted to protecting their dependants and

supporters; they are leaders of an entire community that looks up to them. This image of a strong leader that Mohanlal-movies and action movies of Bollywood propagated in the 1990s reflect a larger desire in the Indian psyche for political stability under a strong leader though it might be at the cost of democratic values and communal harmony. This “strong leader” has super-hero-like qualities, an aggressive and ruthless masculinity that rejects rules and customs in the execution of his will. Thus the role of the 1990s movies in deciding the future of India in the 21st century is not negligible.

These neo-feudal movies often combined picaresque elements with the thriller formula and touched it up with humour. The hero is outwardly a rogue (but one who ultimately wins the viewers’ sympathy), caught in the clash between right and wrong, good and evil, undergoing insufferable trials and traumas that are a fire-test of his masculinity and heroism. The spicing of humour brought these gigantic heroes closer to the ordinary man and endeared him to the common viewers. These movies reflected in multiple ways the social psychology of an era of transition.

The period that is depicted in these movies betrays an absolute uncertainty and insecurity that reflected the unrest of the society in the 1990s. The society at this time was confused with the massive social transformations and was desperately seeking order and meanings, seeking a powerful socio-political leadership that would resolve the problems of contemporary anarchy. Parallel to these movies are the long lists of murders, rapes, corruption and other fraudulent activities that flourished in the society during this time. Mohanlal heroes in some ways offered a solace and promised the nostalgic order of a bygone era. The

capitalist ideology in these movies could be seen as working on the concept of commodity fetish by branding feudal artefacts and selling the feudal nostalgia. This is in spite of the fact that the capitalist mode of production does not support the feudal one. Thus, the use of commodity fetish through the feudal artefacts as symbols of social and class status, based on casteist Hindutva ideology emerges very clear.

Modernity in Kerala, as different from that of the West, is a blend of the feudal past and Westernized present. This is clear from the representation of the villains in these movies. The villains in these movies are feudal lords who wear jeans and use laptops and live modern lives. The age-old theme of feuds between landlords was lavishly used in films like *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Narasimham*, et cetera. These feuds gave opportunity of exhibiting the feudal culture, where it was established that good always won over evil. In *Devasuram*, the villain (Mundakkal Sekharan) is a feudal lord. In *Aaraam Thampuran*, the villains (Kolappulli Appan and his men) are feudal lords and businessmen with underworld connections. In *Narasimham* and *Thandavam*, the villains are businessman and a politician. In the earlier movies, the feudal elements are predominant while the later movies, the business/political angle is predominant. In *Ravanaprabhu*, the sequel of *Devasuram*, the feudal lord Mundakkal Sekharan and his nephew have become businessmen. This signals a transition of feudalism to capitalism and of modernity to postmodernity as well as the nexus between feudalism, capitalism and politics.

Mohanlal's neo-feudal superstardom finds its roots in movies where he played the role of an underworld don. *Rajavinte Makan* (1986) is perhaps the

first of this kind, and this movie raised the actor to superstardom. The hero Vincent Gomez of this movie is different from other heroes in many ways. He is a perfect criminal. When even the villains have reasons to justify their crimes, this man has none. Neither has he a heroine. Even his maid servant who is a lonely single mother rejects his love. At the end of the movie, he doesn't fulfill his aims either. Even then the movie was a box-office hit and Mohanlal became a superstar. The hangover of the superhero feudal films owes a lot to this success. Superstar movies like Mammooty's *New Delhi*, Suresh Gopi's *Ekalavyan*, Jayaram's *Dilliwalla* *Rajakumaran* and *Thoovalkottaram*, and Dileep's *Meesamadhavan* all feature heroes who are justified in their actions and who are salvaged from their mistakes at the end of the movie.

After the neo-feudal movies of the 1990s, Mohanlal began to do surrealistic roles in high-budget films like *Pulimurugan* (2016) and *Odiyan* (2018), where the character of Mohanlal, always emerged as the good-doer. *Pulimurugan* competed with Sci-fi films like *Ra-One*, *Robo* (or *Enthiran*), *Krrish*, *Avatar* and the *Avengers* series, to name a few. The trends in the larger global markets, where the hero who is the repository of all virtue and superhuman physical strength, emerges as the savior, not only of humans, but also of values and customs, was aped blindly into Malayalam cinema. The heroes in the big-budget superhero movies of Hollywood and Bollywood do nothing short of saving the world. This discourse is placed within the phenomenon of Americanization and cultural homogenization, which are obviously the inevitable results of globalization. Ian Chapman in the article "Superheroes: Saviours of Neoliberal Globalisation?" attests to this:

Though superficially CGI-filled outings, these films tell us a lot about the USA. America is defined by Hollywood, especially certain genres that relate to US culture, superhero films being the latest to do this. Since *X-Men*'s release at the turn of the century, this type of film has grown in popularity to become the mainstay of action movies, having taken the role once occupied by Westerns as defining what the USA is all about. More than mere entertainment, they affirm America's status as global superpower and leader of the 'free-world'. They are meaning-laden modern myths.

These modern "myths" seek to provide solutions to modern problems and naturalize cultural beliefs and notions. The superhero movies of Mohanlal create and maintain the indigenous myths of the heroic saviour who is in relentless war against evil, the patriarchal family with its all-powerful but loving male head and submissive woman as well as strong sibling relationships, the myth of a democratic nation that is based on strong military power, the myth of cosmopolitanism and universal citizenship, and so on. More than a powerful superhero, Mohanlal's characters emerged as a family man with great goodness and virtues. The superhero movies of Mohanlal of the 2000s are also simultaneous with the military movies like *Keerthi Chakra* (2006), *Kandahar* (2010), and so on which propagated the same myths. *Baba Kalyani* (2006) is another terrorist-movie of this period when the Mohanlal character heroically captures the terrorists.

Mohanlal's superhero style action movies like *Pulimurugan* with computer generated high-tech animation, offer a technological spectacle or melodramatization. Christine Gledhill, in the article "Signs of Melodrama," comments on this kind of melodramatization: "Melodrama's mode of personification is not only a question of facial expression and gesture", and points out that "melodrama subordinates character to narrative action, staging devices, lighting effects and theatrical *mise en scene*—in other words to visual rather than to verbal effects" (214). These computer-generated visual effects point to a displacement of the ordinary human being with the computer-generated spectacle. It is to be noted that in the recent techno-movies of Rajnikanth and Mohanlal, graphics, animation and special effects compensate for the aging bodies of the superstar. Thus the sci-fi genre and high-tech animation aid to the construction of the superstar image, defying the limitations of the superstar's body. Mohanlal movies bear witness to such a change which deeply reflects the pressures of a globalized industry.

Having introduced Mohanlal movies and their development down the decades in this manner, I shall now proceed to analyse Mammooty movies similarly. Then the analysis of Mohanlal-movies of the 1990s (with particular emphasis on *Devasuram* (1993) and *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997) along with Mammooty's *Dhruvam* (1993) and *Valyettan* (2000) will follow, in order to examine them for neo-feudal elements that support globalization. I shall identify main thematic orientations which will be traced in these movies along with the use of filming techniques.

Mainstream Indian cinema has been closely associated with folk traditions and local cultures. Almost a good majority of popular mainstream films are built on the plotlines borrowed from Mahabharata and Ramayana, which were essentially male-centred in their populist versions. For the same reason, Malayalam cinema (as other Indian cinemas) is deeply rooted in a male-centric heroic ideology. The hero, a multi talented personality, should be well-versed in all arts. He should sing and dance well. He should also be good at humour. A strong physique capable of thrashing battalions to the ground comes as a natural inclusion. Singing, dancing and humour are inevitable ingredients of an Indian mainstream movie. That an actor who cannot sing, dance or wield humour easily commanded the Malayalam screen for well over two decades is quite surprising. It is even more surprising that he is in the forefront of Tamil cinema also, which is even more deeply rooted in singing and dancing.

The choice of characters that Mammooty has played on screen is very carefully made and character development has been done over these decades to suit the actor's personality and public image. While the hallmark of Mohanlal's career is the casual and the ordinary, Mammooty's career and screen presence is characterized by careful planning and choice. From his first major movie *Mela* to the recent blockbuster *Madhuraraja*, this is evident. Mammooty's best characters approach life with an earnest seriousness in contrast to Mohanlal's careless playfulness. Mammooty characters hide an ocean of tenderness under a rough exterior. One of his best roles, Raghavan Nair in *Vatsalyam*, and one of his most popular roles, Madhavanunni in *Valyettan* are examples.

Both these characters had to suffer the trials of life from an early age itself. They gave priority to the lives of their loved ones (siblings) over their own. When the actions of their siblings hurt the heroes, the heroes suffer in silence. The brother's marriage in *Vatsalyam* is an example. However, when the siblings are even slightly hurt, the heroes can't bear it. Hence Madhavanunni ruthlessly beats up the police officer for hurting his brother Appu who gets involved in a police case.

The characters played by Mammooty also portray the psychological dilemmas and troubles of a society that moves from feudalism to globalized modernity. Even more than Mohanlal, Mammooty is known by his characters such as Sethuramaiyyer, Inspector Balram, Taradas, and many more. These characters of Mohanlal are picaresque anti-heroes who have, like the said characters of Mammooty, suffered in life from an early age, hide trauma and tenderness within a rough exterior, often ready to sacrifice their life for loved ones. So what gave such characters such a mileage in these times of globalization?

All these characters mentioned above struggle to escape from the shackles of the past and make use of the opportunities offered to them by globalized capitalism, nevertheless preserve the values and relationships of an old world order. This dichotomy in their development often makes them uneasy with their achievements and with the changes in life and society. Relationships that have to be sacrificed for the sake of materialistic growth and the new fashions and risks adopted by their siblings and loved ones are all causes of worry and unrest to

these heroes. Mammootty's characters in *Thinkalazhcha Nalla Divasam* and *Aalkkoottathil Thaniye* are also cases in point.

The same strands of social commentary are discernible in the “husband roles” Mammootty did towards the middle of the career. The first kind of these husbands is often troubled by their troubled wives. An example is *Avidathepole Ivideyum* (1985). A second stereotype of the husband-character is the man who is trapped in his memories of a wife who left him or died, and cannot have another life. An example is *Makan, Ente Makan*. Mammootty did such husband roles at a time when women changed drastically in the society in terms of their dressing and lifestyle. The women of Kerala had in the mid-1980s broken the shackles of convention and begun to bob their hair, dress in a sexually attractive and liberated manner in “low-waist saree” and salwar kameez, drive Premier Padmini cars, and so on. The movie *Sreedharante Onnam Thirumurivu* has depicted powerfully the urban-rustic, modern woman-conservative man conflicts. Mammootty often featured in movies as the powerful traditionalist who tames the shrewish modern woman.

A third stereotype of the husband that Mammootty brought on screen is that of the monogamous devoted husband. The spectators who were trapped between “two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born”, that is, a disappearing conventional society and the not-yet-acceptable modern one clung to these nostalgic portraits of the changing family desperately and made box-office hits of these movies. Thus Mammootty emerged as the very picture of the ideal man, especially for the younger and middle-aged women among the spectators. He emerged as the rough-and-tough guy (a role which Mohanlal also

played to perfection in a slightly different way) with a loving heart, as the title of a 1986 movie itself goes: *Snehamulla Simham* (Loving Lion). This ideal-man fantasy that formed in the Malayali woman's consciousness is represented in the movie *Thalayinamanthram* when the character played by Urvashi tells her not-so-handsome husband played by Sreenivasan: "*Ningal Mammoottye pole sundaranayirunnu.*" [You were as handsome as Mammootty] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

The domestic movies where Mammootty played the husband role led to his stereotyping and nearly wrecked his career. A significant break came with the movie *New Delhi* (1987) in which he played the negative character J.K., a journalist who prepares the news of the death of his enemies and then kills them. Then came a number of diverse roles in succession in the CBI series starting from 1988, *Koodevide* (1983), *Kathodu Kathoram* (1985), *Yatra* (1985), *Thaniyavarthanam* (1987), *1921* (1988), *Abkari* (1988), *Artham* (1989), *Mrugaya* (1989), *Mathilukal* (1990), *Patheyam* (1993), *Bhoothakkanadi* (1997), and so on. After the domestic movies also came his police movies starting with *Aavanazhi* (1986) and its sequel *Inspector Balram* (1991), both directed by I.V. Sasi based on the script by T. Damodaran. These movies also show the clash between a dying old world order and an emerging new one.

The character C.I. Balram in *Aavanazhi* breaks free from a disciplined life and turns to a wayward life of excessive drinking and womanizing, when he is troubled by the plight of a Brahmin father whose son is believed to be killed by Balram by custodial torture. This Brahmin father is a feudal lord of old times, and Balram is part of capitalist modernity. Finally, after having killed the villain who

had really killed the Brahmin boy, Balram returns to the fold of the family. Later also, such as the character Commissioner Ramanathan in *Rakshasarajavu* (2001), the heroes played by Mammooty maintain the formula: Robin Hood style corruption to uphold virtues, monogamous attachment to wife, the return to family structure, and son. The famous character Sethuramaiyyer in *Oru CBI Diarykkurippu* is an entirely virtuous, ideal Tamil Brahmin. The villains are contractors, politicians, moviemakers, police officers, and so on. Such an espousal of upper caste characters and negative portrayal of bureaucrats and professional classes is problematic and betrays a feudal ideology as the backdrop of these movies. Thus in Mammooty's movies, the opposites of the old and new clash directly or indirectly. For the Kerala society these movies comprised an escape from the dilemmas of social change in the wake of globalization.

An analysis of Mammooty movies leads to a look at the Malayali conception of ideal masculinity which Mammooty represents on screen, in contrast with the moral ambivalence of Mohanlal heroes. Mammooty commands the screen with his appearance, voice, well-maintained physique and expressive acting, which make up for his limitations in dancing and humour. It is a well-known fact for the people of Kerala that Mammooty carefully maintains his youthful physique and beauty even in his 60th year of life. From a family man image that Mammooty had in the 1980s, he changed over to a youthful hero image in the 1990s, as demanded by the peculiarities of the globalized society of Kerala. While Mohanlal, Mammooty and Dileep carved a largely "homely young man" image for themselves in Malayalam cinema, Prithviraj's presence on

the screen was more akin to the Bollywood hero, more muscular and sexually attractive, younger and romantic.

After the Prithviraj era, there has been a drastic change in what has been called the “new gen” films. Heroes in many movies made by new filmmakers are ordinary, unheroic powerless men who do not subscribe to high standards of masculinity and heroism. Cases in point are *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011) directed by Sameer Thahir, *Ustad Hotel* (2012) directed by Anwar Rasheed, *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) directed by Ashiq Abu, *Ee Adutha Kalathu* (2012) directed by Arun Kumar Aravind, *Bangalore Days* (2014) directed by Anjali Menon, *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016) directed by Dileesh Pothan, *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019) directed by Madhu C. Narayanan.

A very major aspect of Mammootty’s career that endeared him to Kerala audiences is how Mammootty embraces the Other. Mammootty naturally has a huge fan following in north Kerala. Mammootty’s exceptional ability to be ‘totally believable’ when playing Brahmin and high-caste Hindus and his especial ability to play Christians has gained him great popularity in all other parts of Kerala. He speaks the many dialects of Malayalam more effortlessly than Mohanlal. Examples are the characters in *Vidheyan*, *Kottayam Kunjachan*, *Rajamanikyam*, *Pranchiyettan*, *Dada Sahib*, *Kunjananthante Kada*, and so on.

This chapter analyzes primarily four blockbuster movies of the 1990s to examine them for the presence of conservative feudal revivalist ideology that was symptomatic of the post-Liberalization era. These movies are replete with caste / class discourses that go against the more liberal narratives of the Malayalam

movies of the 1980s. In the 1970s and 80s, there was an unmistakable liberal / leftist angle to film narratives, as evidenced by the movies of directors like Padmarajan, Bharathan, K.G. George, I.V. Sasi, and so on. Examples are the movies *Angadi* (1980) and *Ee Nadu* (1982) directed by I.V. Sasi; *Thakara* (1979), *Kattathe Kilikkoodu* (1983) and *Amaram* (1991) by Bharathan; *Kallan Pavithran* (1981) and *Oridathoru Phayalvan* (1981) by Padmarajan and *Aadaminte Variyellu* (1984) directed by K.G. George. However, the movies of I.V. Sasi and T. Damodaran turned rightist in the 1990s, in the wake of Globalization. Examples are the movies T. Damodaran scripted: *Aryan* (1988), *Abhimanyu* (1991), *Advaitam* (1992), *Mahatma* (1996), and so on. The hypothesis is that in the 1990s, movies of Renjith, Shaji Kailas, S.N. Swamy, etc are highly rightist in ideology as different from the earlier movies of the previous decade, as this chapter will examine. The four movies under focus are *Devasuram* (1993, direction I.V. Sasi, screenplay Renjith), *Dhruvam* (1993, direction Joshiy, screenplay S.N. Swamy), *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997, direction Shaji Kailas, screenplay Renjith) and *Valyettan* (2000, direction Shaji Kailas, screenplay Renjith).

All the four heroes have feudal backgrounds. Mangalasseri Neelakantan (played by Mohanlal) in *Devasuram* belongs to an old reputed upper caste Hindu family and is presumably the son of the illustrious Madhava Menon. Narasimha Mannadiyar (Mammootty) in *Dhruvam* is also high-born and is virtually a king ruling over and protecting his subjects even in this era of democracy. Jagan (Mohanlal) in *Aaraam Thampuran* is from a cosmopolitan culture, has travelled across the world and been involved in international business relationships, and he

is from a high Brahmin family, which lineage he has to hide due to a misunderstanding that is yet to be cleared up. Madhavanunni (Mammooty) in *Valyettan* is from a high family but has been poor due to dispossession. However, now he is self-made and very hardworking as well as wealthy, and now has a luxurious life, with expensive cars and other facilities.

All the four plots and the protagonists follow an unmistakably feudal formula, as detailed below:

- (a) wealthy, traditional families
- (b) upper caste backgrounds
- (c) ruling power or authority
- (d) surrounded by a group of devoted, subordinate men
- (e) supremely powerful and virtuous
- (f) disrespectful to law and unperturbed in breaking rules
- (g) the self-righteous duty of punishing the very evil villain
- (h) associated with the virtues of sacrifice, patience, stoic suffering, kindness and generosity
- (i) the relationship with the heroine is subdued, not one of youthful love, and devoid of sexuality if not Platonic

All these elements shall be discussed in detail here.

In the semi-urban middle class societies depicted in these movies, the basic unit of the social fabric is indeed the family. The family is never the ideal. The family structure is often threatened by external forces. Parents and children are separated by death or other reasons and often surrogate families are formed.

The traditional family structure is disrupted by feudal aspects such as clashes over land and property, feud and revenge, oppressive relationships, honour, and power imbalance especially among men. The following Malayalam words denoting a traditional social and family structure resound in these movies: *acharam*, *sastram*, *sapam*, *abhimanam* [ritual, treatise, curse, honour]. These terms uphold a Hindutva ideology of a predominantly Hindu society.

The neo-feudal movies of the 1990s are deeply rooted in patriarchy, but indicate the birth of a new era in the society—to be precise, the dawn of a globalized postmodernity. Modernity (in Kerala as in many of the Third World countries) emerged from social trauma and destruction, while postmodernity emerged from affluence and increased opportunities brought about by globalization and neo-liberalization. In movies like *Spadikam* (1995), *Narasimham* (2000) and *Ravanaprabhu* (2001), the central character is in direct confrontation with his father. In movies like *Devasuram* (1993) and *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997), the father is absent. This has an Oedipal connotation. In all these cases, there is the subjugated mother as well as the grandfather / uncle / surrogate father figure. The death / defeat / absence of the father indicates the death of modernity and the birth of postmodernity. The death or defeat of the father also leads to the absence of the mother from the screen. The fathers in these movies represent modernity and its obsessions as well as feudal interests. Correcting the mistakes of the father and getting the father to accept the hero indicates the end of modernity and the beginning of postmodernity. Very good examples of the feudal father are Thilakan's characters in *Spadikam* (1995) and *Narasimham* (2000).

In *Devasuram* (1993), there is an overweening presence of the father in the protagonist Neelan's life. He keeps saying he is Mangalasseri Madhava Menon's son, thereby glorifying another aspect of feudalistic societies—heredity and family honour. It is repeated many times in the movie that the hero Neelan has his father's voice, that his father was a great man who was just and kind, that he was blessed by the local deity. The father's memory is kept alive by the presence of his antique car which Neelan cares for and talks to, and does not drive. The very identity and self-esteem of Neelan is defined in terms of his father and his memory.

Neelan is depicted as naturally devastated when he learns from his mother that Madhava Menon is not his father, but had embraced as his own son Neelan, whom his mother has conceived before her marriage to him. It is noteworthy that Neelan doesn't feel obliged to the late Madhava Menon for having given him a life of honour, neither does he feel respect for that great humanitarian deed done by that man. Instead, in a triumph of patriarchal values, Neelan is angry and disappointed. Neelan grieves that he has received his life as a charity from the aristocratic man who was deemed to be his father. Neelan says he is only used to giving charity, not receiving it. This is indeed an unmistakable valorization of the upper caste as well. When Neelan worries who his biological father is, Ezhuthachan (played by Jose Prakash) consoles him, "*Ellam kondum yogyanaya oralayirunnu. Rajaraktham thanneya ee dehathu koode ozhukunnathu.*" [Was a well-suited person in all respects. These veins hold regal lineage itself] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

In *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997), the protagonist Jagan's father is absent in the narrative. The father, Kaloor Brahmaddattan Namboothirippad, a poor Brahmin, was unfairly suspected of stealing the divine ornaments from the temple and the grief-stricken poor man had struck his head on the sacrificial stone (*balikkallu*) and died. This has brought the curse of *Brahmahatya*, or the curse that befalls a society or a man for killing a Brahmin, and the discontinued temple festival should be once again conducted to make amends for it. Jagan has completely hidden from the people of Kanimangalam the fact he is that poor Brahmin's son, but takes upon himself the responsibility of conducting the festival which was not conducted for the past many years. This he does for his own father's memory as well as for the people of Kanimangalam who seek deliverance from the cruel regime of Appan Thampuran. The father and his memory are therefore as decisive of the hero's identity and actions as they are in the earlier movie, *Devasuram*. Jagan's life as a cosmopolitan citizen, spanning across India and foreign countries, indulging in fighting and business intrigues bordering on immorality are to be seen as an Oedipal rebellion against the ideal figure father, which is equally or even more pronounced in *Devasuram*.

The Neo-Liberal cultural consumption in the movies of Mohanlal employed symbols of strong Hindutva ideology and enhanced consumerism by repeating the pattern. Meena T. Pillai observes this trend of cultural consumption of the Hindutva construction. She says:

Interestingly, the consumerism and materialism associated with stereotypes of the feminine in earlier cinema chart a significant deviation linking notions of self-indulgence and fetishist

consumption with the hegemonic masculine. The trend started by *Rajavinde Makan* (The Son of the King, 1986) and *Irupatham Noottandu* (Twentieth Century, 1987), gets to movies like *Devasuram* (The God-Demon, 1993), *Commissioner* (1994), *Spadikam* (Prism, 1995), *The King* (1995), *Aaraam Thampuran* (The Sixth Lord, 1997), *Narasimham* (The fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, God who is half human and half lion, 2000), *Ravanaprabhu* (Ravana, the Lord, 2001), etc. (109)

An innocent Brahmin's son taking revenge for his father's murder is the backdrop of the movie *Guru* (1997), directed by Rajiv Anchal with a screenplay by C.G. Rajendra Babu. This plot thread is infused into larger social concerns of religious extremism, communal tension and political manipulation of the masses. When Raghuraman's (Mohanlal) father is killed by an ambitious politician's goons who pose as Muslims, he joins a Hindu extremist group to take revenge. However, he is cured of his extremism and starts to uphold religious harmony when he is fantastically transported to a world where he learns the horrors of ideological blindness. Here the people are tricked into going blind by eating a special fruit and taught from a young age itself that sight does not exist. The people are also warned against eating the seeds of this fruit which is incidentally the antidote for their blindness. Raghuraman gives these people their sight and also fights to prevent the extremists from causing communal clashes.

The presence of father-figures who are not actually biological fathers is important in the Mohanlal-movies. Warriar (played by Innocent) in *Devasuram* and Krishna Varma (played by Oduvil Unnikrishnan) in *Aaraam Thampuran* are

examples. These father-figures are not efficient powerful men, but are rather ridiculed for their inefficiency. Krishna Varma is made fun of in a genial manner by Unnimaya for not making money or giving her even the essential requirements of life. Warriar is called “Konthan Varyare”, made fun of by Neelan for his stupidity. There is also the character Peringodan (played by Oduvil Unnikrishnan) in *Devasuram* who is a surrogate brother or father to Neelan. He is a simpleton who wanders the world and is nowhere what can be defined as worldly success. Appu mash (played by Nedumudi Venu) is also an inefficient, rather mean character who is depicted as highly unheroic and helpless. All these older men in Mohanlal-movies portray the “Other” of the hero, strengthening the protagonist’s image as powerful and youthful.

A Mohanlal movie of the later decade that valorizes the ideals of family, father and other patriarchal values is *Drishyam* (2013), direction and screenplay by Jeethu Joseph. This movie was the highest-grossing movie ever in Malayalam, until it was surpassed by another Mohanlal-starrer *Pulimurugan*. The success of the movie lies in the suspense-ridden theme of how a father protects his family by hiding a murder committed by his wife to save the honour of their daughter. The salient features of the theme are that the murder is committed to protect a girl’s honour, the murder is committed by a woman and her daughter, the murder is that of a powerful police officer (played by Asha Sarath)’s son, and the father successfully hides this crime (done for a just cause), blindfolds the law and saves his family heroically. The greatest twist in the movie is perhaps that the protagonist Georgekutty (played by Mohanlal) hides the dead body in foundation of a police station itself that was newly being built in the

vicinity. This movie became phenomenally popular for feeding the fantasies of the middle-classes: the desire to protect women's honour at any cost, to protect the family structure and keep it unified, to make out the father/family-head to be a hero who is intelligent, loving, forgiving, and ready to sacrifice anything for his family, to break down power structures [represented by the Inspector General of Police Geetha Prabhakar (who is herself part of a family unit comprising Prabhakar or Siddique the husband and their son, the dead Varun or Roshan Basheer). These middle-class aspirations that form the foundations of this movie draw from the very feudal structures that gave life to the movies of the 1990s that we have discussed earlier: family, honour, self-righteous rejection of law, patriarchal dominance, and so on.

In the movies of Mamooty, patriarchy takes a different turn. The father or father-figure is the Mamooty-character himself. In *Dhruvam* (1993), the Mannadiyar's benevolent grandfather is mentioned, whom Narasimha Mannadiyar (Mamooty) has taken after. The element of heredity is thus emphasized. Mamooty is like a father to his brother Veerasimha Mannadiyar (played by Jayaram), to Bhadran (played by Vikram) and Maya, as well as to the people of his "kingdom". In *Valyettan*, Madhavanunni is undoubtedly the patriarch, standing in place of the absent father (who escaped by committing suicide and left the responsibilities of the family to his eldest son), and loving, protecting and punishing his brothers.

In a discussion on how the masculinity of the protagonist is strengthened by representations of "Other", less powerful versions of men, the images of lower caste men, disabled men, and so on should also be mentioned. The presence of

Kalabhavan Mani in two of these movies—as the dark-skinned mentally retarded simpleton, Cheriya Namboothiri, in *Aaraam Thampuran* and the small-scale criminal Pappan in *Valyettan*—are cases in point. Cheriya Namboothiri’s disability and behaviour evoke laughter. He says he can do all the poojas but it is no use. “*Enthu cheythittum bhalalye. Sappan ennulla viliya bakki. Lesam mental indo enik ennu samsayikkanavarundey*” [Nogains, whatever I do. Just the bad name as dim-wit. Some suspect I’m slightly mental]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

Pappan in *Valyettan* is also given a derogatory treatment. Upon seeing Pappan for the first time, Madhavanunni body-shames him, “*Ayye ivana? Kashtipalli Pappan* (distorts the name in Malabar style) *ennokke paranjappol njan vicharichu oru era kanumennu*” [Oh this guy? I had thought he would be worthy a prey]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

In the same movie *Valyettan*, the disabled brother Sankaran (Sudhish) undergoes shaming in what is presented as apparently good-humoured fun. Take this scene for example:

Raghu (Siddique) comes to find Sankaran (Sudhish) lying on a traditional recliner, listening to old film songs on the radio.

Raghu: Where’s everyone?

Sankaran: Appu has gone out with his friends from college.

Raghu: *Ratriyilano friendsumayi thendan irangunnath?* [Is it at night that you step out to wander with friends?]

Sankaran: See Raghuvetta, one should study in a college to understand the importance of friends and roaming with them (*sarkeet*). *SSLC anchu pravasyam ezhutheettum SSLC nnu thettathe ezhuthan pattathavarkk athonnum paranjal manassilavilla*. [Those unable to even spell SSLC correctly after five attempts can't possibly understand that]

Raghu: *Nee ethu collegial padichath? 8am classum gustim kazhinja chekkana enne padippikkan varunnath*. [In which college did you study? Shuffled through 8th Grade and trying to teach me!]

Sankaran: *Njondi njondinnolla pillarude vili sahikkan pattanjit nirtheetha*. [Stopped as I couldn't stand the ridicule as "the limp"]

Raghu: *Pinne njondikkalane njondinnallathe thendinna vilikky*a? [Limps can't be called wimps, can they?]

Sankaran becomes sad.

Raghu: *Enthada ith? Karayye? Arackale monkuttan karayye? ... Ettan varumbo parippuvada vangi tharam*. [What's this? Tears? Kid brother of Arackal in tears?...I'll get you *Parippuvada* when I return]

Sankaran: *Unniyappom koodi vangicholuu. Allenkil enne karayippichunnu paranju kodukkum*. [Buy *Unniyappom* too. Or I'll tell that you made me cry!]

Sankaran listens to the radio again and the song says *mudanthi nadakkum...* [limping along..] he switches it off quickly. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

The scene discussed here involves body-shaming, patronizing of the weaker man and also an infantilization that indirectly defines accepted notions of masculinity. The scene also shows a number of middle-class values, such as the importance of friends, college education, urbanity, ridicule of disability, virtues of masculinity, the importance of legacy, binary oppositions like educated vs illiterate, adult vs child, and so on.

The discourses of masculinity and heroism are shaped around certain spaces where a culture associated with the heroes develop: *poomukham* (the front verandah of the traditional Nair house), *angadi* (the market), *kalari* (where the martial arts are practised), and so on. The men in *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran* assemble in the *poomukham* always. This is where Jagan meets the people of Kanimangalam, this is where Neelan makes Bhanu dance, this is where men's drinking and socializing take place. The *angadi* is where Sekharan wants to meet Neelan and where Jagan fights Chenkalam Madhavan (who has come to help Kolappulli Appan, played by Mohanraj). They don't want to fight in front of women and children, but only in front of other men. The identity of the hero depends on the constitution of the male bodies and on the male gaze upon men. The male bodies fighting in the market, wallowing in mud and sending the fruits, vegetables and other produce flying in the air is a familiar scene in mainstream movies. The *kalari* is also associated with the male bodies and their control as well as the forging of a usually men-only space.

An important aspect of postmodernity as well as globalization is the importance accorded to youth. Energy and youthfulness have become the lynchpin of contemporary culture and a necessary prerequisite for survival in the contemporary globalized society. Youth is a very lucrative commodity in these times. Even middle aged and elderly people are pushed to gyms, health clubs and beauty parlours, and become avid consumers of organic health foods and branded and body-shaping clothing. Mohanlal's acting and screen presence exudes youthfulness because of the free employment of body movements and gestures, a captivating smile, humour, dancing, young heroines, youthful mannerisms and repeated expressions like "*Po mone Dinesha*" or "*Savari giri giri*", and so on. These make up for his slightly obese and homely appearance. This priority given to youthfulness also points to the importance of the human body as a signifier in the present times. The appearance and ability of the human body is nowhere more significant than in celebrity culture and movies. The manipulation and management of the body as well as the meanings connoted by the body images of actors play a major role in creating stardom. Christine Gledhill talks about how melodrama is created through personification, where actors and the characters they represent embody ethical forces through their personality, gestures, dress, action, and their bodies in general. Camera angles and the nature of the shots control the spectators' gaze on the actors' bodies. Gledhill says, "Stars reach their audiences primarily through their bodies. Photography, and especially the close-up, offers audiences a gaze at the bodies of stars closer and more sustained than the majority of real-life encounters" (214). While Hollywood and Bollywood explore and depict the ideal well-maintained male bodies, South

Indian cinema has focused on the homely appearance of male actors, as more ordinary and accessible, which gives the impression of the guy next door, represented by Mohanlal.

Heroism is an undeniable element of feudalistic culture that is one of the main ingredients of the movies under scrutiny here. The heroes are all depicted as superhuman, with unnatural physical strength and capacity for endurance of physical pain as well as mental agony. The presentation of the hero often involves a dichotomy between the rough exterior and the gentle, kind inner self that often gets revealed as the result of the transformation of character. In *Devasuram* (1993), the hero Neelakantan is a ruthless ruffian at the beginning, using his heroic prowess to make Bhanumathy (played by Revathy) dance for him and his friends. He has also defeated the villain Mundakkal Sekharan every time, causing undying hatred in his heart. However, Neelan changes from an indomitable hero to a gentle protector of Bhanu, to a broken body completely destroyed by the villain. From physical strength and courage, he changes over to a realization of his mental power. And at the end the movie shows him at the greatest extent of his endurance. He says he wants a peaceful life and for that he paradoxically cuts off Sekharan's arm.

At first Neelan is like a picaro, abandoned by his mother on account of his wayward life. After his transformation, he becomes a gentle, virtuous, chivalrous man whose act of extreme violence at the end of the movie is only an indication of his desire to put an end to the feud, and lead a peaceful life. He does not want to teach the villain a lesson, like Jagan does not want to teach Kolappulli Appan a lesson at the end of *Aaram Thampuran*. Neelan's transformation also indicates

his change from the pampered son of a virtuous upper caste feudal gentleman to the mature realization that he is a “bastard” in a patriarchal society. It is noteworthy that when Neelan was a feudal lord he had been flagged by friends and dependants, but after his near-fatal fight with Sekharan and his subsequent transformation, all his friends leave him.

The transformation of Neelan in *Devasuram* parallels a transformation that Jagan undergoes in *Aaraam Thampuran* (1997). From a rootless and rather irresponsible wanderer and a business goon who has no connections with his family or past, Jagan transforms to a responsible and mature hero who fulfills his duties towards his father’s memory, towards his people and towards the woman he loves. If he is slightly unjust to his friend Nandan, teaches Nandan’s friends a lesson and shuts him up in a room, it is because Nandan symbolizes Jagan’s past that he is trying to reject. The past / Nandan has to accept Jagan in his own terms, as the *thampuran* of Kanimangalam.

In these two movies, the villains are as much part of the feudal system as the heroes. In fact, the very binary concepts of hero/villain, good/evil, and right/wrong are feudal concepts. The villain also illustrates feudal values such as revenge through the use of physical might, being surrounded by goons or feudal vassals, ill-treatment of women, possession and misuse of land and property, ruthless cruelty, and so on. The villains in both movies are steadfast in their purpose of revenge, while the heroes magnanimously almost forgive them and wouldn’t kill them. Such forgiveness on the part of the heroes reveals not only their essential goodness but also the superior caste positioning in the society.

Mannadiyar in the Mammooty-starrer *Dhruvam* (1993) is also certainly a superhuman hero, the epitome of justice, intelligence and benevolent power, the only man in the entire country who can do anything to bring about justice by executing Haider Marakkar. Mannadiyar has more cronies than any other hero in the selected movies, which includes the very high-placed Inspector General of Police, Marar. Compared to Mannadiyar, the entire judiciary and bureaucratic system of the country seems powerless and helpless. Like Neelan, and to some extent Jagan, changes from a ruthless, invincible hero to a gentle-hearted and vulnerable man, Mannadiyar, with the murder of his brother, changes to a sensitive vulnerable man (who cries loudly to see his brother's corpse).

Madhavanunni in *Valyettan* (2000) is already sensitive and vulnerable when it comes to his brothers, and is struck exactly at his weakest spot by the villain. Madhavanunni's tremendous love for his brothers is what gives him superhuman strength to beat up a group of men alone and to hide the fact from his brothers that he had to marry a poor girl. These heroes are the epitome of the traditional feudal values of stoic sacrifice, justice and mercy.

The presentation of heroism and masculinity in these two movies follows the pattern of repetitive performance. In movie after movie, the same patterns of heroism are repeated. In these movies the fights between the hero and villain are said to have repeated several times over the years every time digging deeper into their hearts and lives, and taking on new meanings.

The movie *The King* (1995), directed by Shaji Kailas with a screenplay by Ranji Paniker, is steeped in the ideals of heroism and masculinity, following

similar lines as above in depicting the police force and bureaucracy as corrupt. The protagonist Joseph Alex IAS (played by Mammootty) is an incorruptible IAS officer who unveils a conspiracy behind a communal clash in Kozhikode as hatched by some politicians and police officers. Incidentally, the movie is produced by Manjalamkuzhi Ali, who was later a politician and Minister. The movie has a notorious male chauvinistic speech spoken by Joseph Alex to his assistant Anura IAS (played by Vani Viswanath) who acts over-smart in an attempt to overcome her family traumas.

The presence of subordinate men (analogous to vassals) who represent submission and allegiance is an inevitable dimension of heroism all feudal societies. The hero would be a chivalrous protector of his dependants, and chastiser of follies and vices. Indeed, Neelan is a generous patron and a ruthless punisher of mistakes. He patronizes a group of friends, a poor older man called Peringodan, Bhanu's family when they become destitute. When Bhanu insults his friends, Neelan insults her in return by making her dance in front of him and not at the temple. This leads Bhanu to take a terrible vow that she will never dance again. However, Neelan graciously realizes his mistake, changes completely and does not have even a shade of Bhanu's adamant vengefulness. He patiently waits like a true hero for Bhanu to change her mind, gives up his arrogance and apologizes to her, gets badly injured in an attack from the villain Mundakkal Sekharan, and gives up his sexual adventures and decides to help Bhanu with her career without getting romantically involved with Bhanu or desiring her sexually. The whore-like woman Subhadramma (also upper caste, denoted by the "amma"), who has been the mistress of three men including

Neelan, attests to his true masculinity which is not exploitative and cheap (“*Aa paurushathinu mumpil njan chennu veezhukayayirunnu*”) [I fell headlong for that masculinity]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

The other Mohanlal character, Jagan, also changes from a luxurious, free and carefree transnational life to a small village life bound by relationships and responsibilities. He is protective towards his dependants, which includes his friends, the people of Kanimangalam and Unnimaya and Krishna Varier. Jagan’s relationship with Unnimaya is not simply one of love, as he himself professes to Nayan, but it is a kind of patronizing: “*Orarthathil ath premavum pranayavum matramalla. Aarum thunayillathoru pavam penkuttiye protect cheyyanulla theerumanam*” [In a way, it is not just love or infatuation. A resolve to protect a hapless girl who has nobody]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

Jagan is ruthless in punishing wrongdoers, like Abey Mathew who cheated Nandan, Nandan’s friends who ill-treat Unnimaya and Krishna Varier, and of course Kolappulli Appan who unfairly prevents the conduct of the temple festival. The feudal hero is a custodian of virtue and justice and is shown as responsible for meting out rewards and punishments to the deserving people.

This is very clear in the two characters played by Mammooty—Narasimha Mannadiyar and Madhavanunni. Mannadiyar is a king-like patron of his subordinates which includes his own brother and the Inspector General of Police. He will protect and solve the problems of anyone who rings the bell in front of his house and goes to the extent of preventing his brother’s impending marriage to fulfill the romantic relationship of the bride with another man. His

magnanimity is out of the ordinary as he marries a poor lower caste girl to save her father from debt to Mannadiyar himself. It is noteworthy that there was no previous love relationship between Mannadiyar and this girl. In punishing the murderers of his brother, Mannadiyar is unrelenting and ruthless as well.

Madhavanunni in *Valyettan*, like Mannadiyar, marries a girl to save her honour, and not out of love. Love seems to be a demeaning emotion for these highly masculine heroes. His love for his brothers, as he himself professes, is greater than his love for anyone else. He will protect his brothers from anyone at any cost, as he makes clear through many dialogues. He protects them even from himself: by hiding the fact that he had to marry a girl he hopes to protect them from his example and from choosing their life partners by themselves. Madhavanunni cannot bear any harm that befalls his brothers, even if it is by their own actions. That is why he beats his brother Appu with a leather belt for getting involved in a police case. Such beating is glorified by Madhavanunni when he says none of his brothers (except Dasan who is not his biological brother) have escaped his beating. Punishment is defined as a necessary aspect of selfless love in traditional cultures. This idea is upheld by Madhavanunni as well.

The hero in all these movies is the object of extreme devotion and hero-worship. The subordinate men are imperfect and powerless in some way, constituting the masculine Other and presenting the protagonist as a near-perfect and heroic man. Neelan in *Devasuram* is adored by most characters on his side of the story: Warriar, Peringodan, Appu mash (before he shows his true colours and betrays Neelan in favour of his new benefactor Achuthan), and of course Bhanu. Neelan is clearly a cut above his friends who are wimps to get scared of

Sekharan and leave Neelan's company. Warriar is a father-figure to Neelan but Neelan always takes on a superior position in the relationship, teases him and calls him "Konthan Varyare", which Warriar never resents. Neelan's dialogues present Warriar as a foolish simpleton: as when he tells Bhanu, "*Iyal ingane pala mandatharom parayum*" [He will utter many such goofs]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

In *Dhruvam*, Narasimha Mannadiyar is also the subject of devotion—of I.G. Marar, his wife Maithili whom he married as an act of surprising generosity, and presumably, his "subjects". Even the Inspector General is overcome by devotion to Mannadiyar, showing the feudal lord as far superior to the bureaucratic and legal machinery of the State. Mannadiyar is introduced to us with the encomiastic description made by I.G. Marar. He says Mannadiyar is the king of Kamakshipuram, local kingdom. In a modern democratic State, there are no kings and kingdoms, but even a high level police officer of the State continues to accept his supremacy. As if to resolve this issue, the I.G. says that Mannadiyar's grandfather was a great benevolent king and the present Mannadiyar continues that tradition and people still respect him as their king. The implication is unmistakable: that the democratic system is inefficient and corrupt (that is one of the major themes in the film), and the feudal system was great, and still continues to be great.

Jagan is blatantly adored by the people of Kanimangalam and is called their lord or *thampuran*. From the beginning of the movie, Jagan is presented with a superhuman aura: he is associated with Shiva in looks, and with the "Shambho mahadeva" chant. He is like an avatar who has come as the savior of

the Kanimangalam villagers. At the end, especially, after the festival is conducted and Appan defeated, the entire village gathers before the Kovilakam, pleading with Jagan not to leave them. This glorification of one man, the monarch or feudal lord, as symbolizing the hope, freedom and future. However, in *Aaraam Thampuran*, Jagan and Appan are very different in their feudal nature. Appan is the local lord, rooted in his narrow concerns of land and family honour. Jagan is more of a global citizen, broadminded and non-materialistic. He is the representative of neo-feudalism of the post-liberalization era.

Madhavanunni gets no less than devotion and submissive obedience from his brothers and other men including Pappan (played by Kalabhavan Mani) and DYSP Mohammad Ilyas. Madhavanunni gives numerous speeches of this nature: “*Ennum ente kaiyil ente kuttikal undayal mathi. Pinne onnum enik prasnammalla*” [My kids should be in my arms, always. Nothing else matters then]. (Qtd from film, my trans.) CI Chandramohan (played by Ramu) questions Madhavanunni on his power and *thampuran* image. Then Madhavanunni replies:

“*Aa kalamokke poyille sir. Pinne chila sandarbhangaalil nammude athmabhimanathinte mukaliloruthan kaleduthe kayatti vaykkumbo, vecha kaalu kondavanavida chitrappani nadathumbo, njarambilooode odunnath kalarppillatha rakthamanenkil poorvika paramparayilonnum napumsakangal illayenkil nammal chilappol madampimarum thampurakkanmarum okke ayi pokum. Vesham kettan nilkkarilla sir. Vesham kettichal kali kazhinje azhikkarullu.*”

[Those times are way past, sir. Still, when someone dares put his foot atop our self-esteem, tries to trample it further, if our veins hold pure blood and none among our ancestors were eunuchs, at times we might turn into feudal or overlords. I don't dress up for the show, sir. But once in, will end the game before I quit] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

Religion and rituals play a significant role in feudal societies as well as in these neo-feudal movies of the 1990s. When there is liberalization and internationalization on the one hand, there is a growing conservatism and fundamentalism in the globalized society on the other. Three movies under consideration, *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran* and *Valyettan* have an overly religious setting. Neelan in the beginning of *Devasuram* struggles to make the money to renovate the *pattupura* of Ezhilakkara temple where various temple arts had been and will be performed. Bhanu in the same movie is a dancer, and dance is a religious and divine art form. She appears to be praying and singing, as does Unnimaya in *Aaraam Thampuran*.

In *Aaraam Thampuran*, the central issue in the movie is the conduct of a temple festival to appease the deity. *Valyettan* is not about religion per se, but the movie is built on its parallel with the *Mahabharata*. The five brothers are called Panchapandavas, and hence the central theme becomes their fight against injustice. The movie also depicts rituals such as housewarming, marriage (of Bhadran and Maya) and *gruhapravesham* (the ritual of the bride entering the house). In *Dhruvam*, Mannadiyar instructs his wife Maithili that his brother Veerasimhan's marriage should be exactly as per custom. Hindu religion, rituals

and caste system are naturalized in these movies as a normal part of life and tradition that are to be followed unquestioningly. It can also be argued that the role of Hindu religion and rituals as well as upper caste Hindu culture is exaggerated and overplayed as the only central issues in these communities, reigning supreme over pressing social issues like poverty, exploitation, inequality, and so on. The visuals of temples and temple goers, caparisoned elephants, upper caste Hindu clothes and appearance such as white dhoti, sandalwood paste smeared on the forehead, etc are presented in quick succession several times in all these movies, emphasizing certain positions of religion, caste, belief, occupation and lifestyle at the expense of others.

Astrology and Vedic rituals play an important role in movies like *Paithrukam* (1993) and *The Truth* (1998). The protagonist played by Mammooty is a police officer, and his father is a respected astrologer, played by Thilakan. Astrology is shown as equally dependable as scientific investigation in the movie. *Paithrukam* (1993, directed by Jayaraaj) is also a major movie of this period that deals with religion-caste-tradition related themes. It tells another story of a father-son conflict where the son, a *Times of India* journalist from Delhi, Somadathan (played by Suresh Gopi) is a rationalist and atheist who revolts against the beliefs and traditions of his father, the Vedic scholar Devadathan Somayajippadu (played by Narendra Prasad) who has performed a very major *yaga* before and at the end of the movie, performs the elaborate ritual of *Athiratham* (to attain rainfall) successfully. Finally, plagued by a lot of calamities, the son accepts that his father's beliefs were right and follows his footsteps. This movie is very different from the later movies of the Mohanlal

canon like *Spadikam* (1995) where the defeat of the authoritarian father and the order he represents can be regarded as the dawn of a new era of postmodernity.

Jayaraaj's *Desadanam* (1996) was a popular religion-based movie that depicted father-son relationship of a different kind. The movie focuses on the turmoils of a father (played by Vijayaraghavan) and mother (played by Mini Mair) whose son had to take up priesthood at a young age. Interestingly, the child was highly intelligent and his grandfather pledged him to asceticism out of a momentary whim. The family superstitiously and ritualistically holds on to this pledge as an irrefutable and inevitable tragedy and sacrifices the boy's life tearfully. The movie is completely replete with high religiosity, caste rituals and upper caste culture.

Renjith's 2002-movie *Nandanam* is also rather anachronistically rooted in religion and superstition, and shows religion and superstition winning over reason. This can be seen as a retrogressive attempt of the post-globalization Kerala society to hold on to extreme Hindu religiosity. Balamani (played by Navya Nair), a housemaid and an ardent devotee of Krishna, falls in love with Manu, the grandson of her mistress. Manu is almost forced to marry another girl and Balamani prays to Krishna to give her strength to endure it. Krishna appears as a neighbour Unniyettan and assures her that everything will fall in place at the end. Manu's bride runs away with her lover and Balamani is able to marry Manu in the Guruvayur Krishna Temple itself. This movie was extremely popular but is rather shocking for its stereotyping of women and for its retrogressive use of religion. Religion in the ritualistic and conservative sense buttresses neo-feudal tendencies of the globalized world and it can be argued that people turn more to

fundamentalist approaches to religion as evidenced by the communalization of politics and politicization of religions that has led to the Modi-era in India.

One movie that criticizes god-men and their exploitation of religion is *Ekalavyan* (1993), directed by Shaji Kailas, with a screenplay by Renji Paniker. Swami Amoorthananda (played by Narendra Prasad) is a fraudulent god-man with international connections who runs a narcotic business. Madhavan IPS (played by Suresh Gopi), the head of the State Narcotics Wing, nails him. Though the depiction of the underside of religion and god-men should be regarded as a liberal approach, the movie brought out the conservative mindset of the people when the movie sparked a controversy for this reason and the houses of the director and screenplay writer were attacked. To remedy this, Shaji Kailas directed a highly rightist movie immediately following this, named *Rudraksham* (1994).

This leads to a discussion of the concept of the nation in the movies of the post-globalization era. Of all the four movies under detailed discussion here, it is in *Aaraam Thampuran* that the concept of the nation indirectly emerges. From the beginning of the movie, there is a casual dropping of national symbols: for example, when, in a half-joking manner, Jagan says, “*Swathanthryathinte ambathaam varshikamalle? Vande matharam*” [Isn’t it the 50th anniversary of Independence?]. (Qtd from film, my trans.). Until the end of the movie, when Jagan undergoes a transformation, the rest of India is projected as better. There are constant references to the cities of the world as places that Jagan has travelled to, or could travel, suggesting his international connections. These references are a reflection of the hypocritical upper class Malayali psyche that longs to migrate to

metropolises of the world for education, jobs and money, even while upholding and propagating nationalist ideals. Abey Mathew, the guy who cheats Nandan and is beaten up by Jagan, meets foreigners with respect. Names are associated with local places with a derogatory touch: Abey Mathew's father is abused by Jagan as "*Chalisserikkaran Kaala Iype*" [Ox-trader Iype of Chalissery], the District Collector introduces himself to Jagan as "*Kongattukaran Eeswaranunni*" [Eeswaranunni from Kongattu], the latter suggesting that even high bureaucrats are powerless fools in front of the feudal power of Jagan or Appan.

When Jagan talks to Nandan, they refer to Nandan being rich enough to buy the entire State of Kerala. Kerala is apparently mocked as a big village compared to the metropolises of the world. Jagan is said to have lived in North India, mentions North Indian names Kishan Mathur, Ustad Badushah Khan, and mouths Hindi occasionally. Jagan's North Indian and international exposure also seems to make him a better judge of matters compared to his local companions, makes him more powerful (he is the only one who can lead them) and cosmopolitan in outlook (he is the only one who says the festival is a superstition). And at the very beginning of the movie, there is Sanskrit chanting and the suggestion that Jagan is some semi-divine Shiva-like figure (his head gear at the beginning suggests flowing locks for instance), and Jagan also says "Sambho Mahadeva" occasionally... all of which are indirect suggestions of a Hindu rashtra. It is after Jagan changes, that he begins to respect the local culture and his roots. He acknowledges his roots, strives to preserve this father's honour, regards Kanimangalam as better than any other place on earth.

In a discussion on nation and nationalism in post-globalization era movies, Priyadarshan's *Kaalapani* (1996) is an unavoidable title. In 1915 in British India, Govardhan Menon (played by Mohanlal, again an upper caste Hindu from a feudal family of wealthy landlords) is falsely accused of bombing a train, arrested on his wedding day, and jailed in the Port Blair Cellular Jail called "Kaalapani". Fifty years later, Govardhan's nephew Sethu (played by Vineeth) arrives in Port Blair and learns of his uncle's story from historical records. The false accusation was due to Govardhan's resistance against the British authorities and his determination to attain independence. The extreme brutal conditions of the prisoners' lives in Kaalapani leading to the mass murder of some of them prompts Govardhan to rise up against the authorities and eventually to murder one of them. Govardhan is hanged to death and his wife has lived up to this day not knowing whether he is alive. Sethu returns home to tell her that he met Govardhan and talked to him.

Kaalapani came at a time when the History-Romance-Patriotism formula for movies was succeeding across India, with *Roja*, *1942: A Love Story* and *Bombay*. *Kaalapani* failed to achieve its ambitious aim to be an epic period-piece and to catapult the South Indian actors Mohanlal and Prabhu to the national scene due to its commercial elements and romanticization of the nationalist narrative, as well as Priyadarshan's diffidence to explore the vast regions of the mind (Joseph 1996).

The film songs of all these movies also visualize an ethnic, idyllic village life rich with temples and festivals and rituals. For example, in *Dhruvam*, songs like "Thalirvettilayundo" and "Thumbipenne vava" are picturized with scenes of

village life, nature, and the virtues of a traditional life. In *Devasuram* the song “Sooryakireedam” accentuates patriarchal values while “Medapponnaniyum” is visualized by a Mohiniyattom performance. In *Aaram Thampuran*, the “Harimuraleeravam” is a semi-classical song that brings together North Indian traditions with those of the South, and is replete with elements of Hinduism and devotion. The song “Padii” is also semi-classical and expresses simple village values and values of traditional relationships. There are two major songs in *Valyettan*: “*Ellam ormakal mathramayi*” and “*Sivamallipoo*”. The first one valorizes the memories of a fast-fading traditional life, while the second one celebrates local culture.

There is an undeniable anti-Muslim strain of thought that runs through these movies, as well as a valorization of upper caste Hindu culture. In *Devasuram*, Beerankutty, the rich Gulf-resident is ready to buy the Meledathu plot from Neelan, but he is ridiculed for being lower caste and a Muslim. Neelan insults him, “*Edo Mangalasseri muttathu kayari vannu vasthu vilkkunno ennu chodikkanulla dhairyamo ninakku? Ninte vappa andru mappila ee padippurak ippram kaalu kutheettilla. Puzhakkara parambeennu ayalu thenga moshtichappo de ee kanunna puliyanmavinte mela ividathe panikkaru pidichu kettiyittittu thalliyathu*” [Oh, you dare come up to the Mangalasseri courtyard to ask if I want to sell the property? Your Dad Andru Mappila didn’t set foot inside these gates. When he stole coconut from the riverside property, workers tied him to this mango tree here and thrashed him]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

However, Neelan condescends to sell the plot to him finally, though refusing to talk to Beerankutty and carrying out the deal through Warriar

only. The movie *Aaraam Thampuran* is also replete with caste stereotypes. At the outset, an array of characters is presented as representatives of the society who want the festival to be conducted, and all these characters are upper caste Hindus: Nambisan, Psharody, Nambiar, Ezhuthachan, and so on. The villain Appan is a stereotypical Nair karanaver, Kalabhavan Mani plays the simpleton Namboothiri, Krishna Varma is the stereotypical Brahmin who doesn't work and plays with his harmonium all day long, the Christian Abey Mathew is the treacherous businessman, and the Muslim Bappu is the good Muslim (as against the stereotype of the bad Muslim), extremely rich and simple-minded. Jagan stands out as different from the crowd as he is not a stereotypical Brahmin, and is well-travelled and broadminded.

The villains in both Mammooty-movies are Muslims: Haider Marakkar in *Dhruvam* and Mambram Bava in *Valyettan*, while Mammooty plays upper caste Hindu roles. In this context, we should also remember later movies like *Paleri Manikyam*, where Ahmed Haji, played by Mammooty along with the protagonist-detective role of Haridas, is a cruel feudal lord who is suspected for murder, and the murderer turns out to be his first wife's eldest son Khalid Ahmed (also played by Mammooty). By getting Mammooty to play the villainous Muslim roles as well as the role of the Hindu protagonist, the movie hopes to salvage itself of Islamophobia. The names of places and people in all these movies evoke upper caste Hindu traditions steeped in the caste system.

An interesting instance of Muslim-upper caste Hindu relationship is found in the early Mohanlal-movie *His Highness Abdullah* (1990) where the Muslim protagonist Abdullah (played by Mohanlal) disguises as a Brahmin Ananthan

Namboothiri to make money, lives in a royal Hindu family, falls in love with the “king’s” adopted daughter Radha (played by Gautami) and marries her at the end. Though the movie shows the Muslim as equal to the upper caste Hindu and lets him marry the daughter (adopted, not biological) of the king, it is to be noted that the alliance is only possible because he poses as an upper caste Hindu. If he had come in his original identity as a Muslim, his position would be outside the gates of the palace.

In *His Highness Abdullah* as well as in other movies like *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran*, an essential attribute of the upper caste Hindu is that he is a connoisseur of classical arts, especially classical music and dance. Music and dance as integral to the upper caste identity plays a central role in other Mohanlal-starrers of the same time, like *Bharatham* (1991) and *Kamaladalam* (1992), both directed by Sibi Malayil, screenplay by A.K. Lohithadas, the story of the relationship (with suggestions of forbidden love) between a guru and his disciple. Classical arts like music, dance and Kathakali were inseparable parts of Kerala’s feudal past and upper caste Namboothiri culture. There are many movies in Malayalam that explore the themes of caste relations and illicit love in the context of the arts. Examples are Vineeth-starrers *Sargam* (1992, direction and screenplay Hariharan) and *Parinayam* (1994, direction Hariharan, screenplay M.T. Vasudevan Nair), and Mohanlal-starrer *Vanaprastham* (1999, direction and screenplay Shaji N. Karun).

Along with the excellent artistic tastes and talents of the upper caste man, his power over the rest of the characters is also significant. Not only are they physically powerful, but they are morally and socially powerful as well. They are

naturally accepted as the lords and leaders, and rightfully have an admiring fan-following. Neelanin *Devasuram* is presented as invincible, and his power is more of the mind, while the lesser men are just physically powerful. Neelan has defeated Sekharan since childhood, like Madhavanunni has defeated Sivaraman in *Valyettan*. Finally, Neelan defeats Sekharan with only one hand and does not let his friends help him with it. Jagan is like a superhuman power, and presented as an analogue to Lord Shiva. Madhavanunni also beats up Mambram Bava and his men singlehandedly, without initially taking the help of his brothers, and locking them up inside the house instead.

The two Mohanlal characters Neelan and Jagan dangle between the high-born and the low, between supreme power and powerlessness, between good and evil. Neelan thinks he is the great Madhava Menon's son only to realize he is a bastard. Jagan is a high-born Brahmin but he has to hide the fact. Neelan swings from good health and power to being a completely battered body that is beaten up ruthlessly by Sekharan. Jagan is caught between being the powerful lord (*thampuran*) of Kanimangalam Kovilakam and the powerless and almost penniless man who depends on Nandan to gain his right over the Kovilakam. Neelan has been immoral and is rejected by his mother and uncles, but he turns out to be the very epitome of virtue. Jagan has had a globalized life lived across countries wallowing in wealth, a life of crime and punishment, but retracts into a small idyllic and virtuous village life in Kanimangalam.

Depictions of justice, law and bureaucracy in these movies betray a largely feudal mindset. Both the Mammootty-movies depict the police and legal system of the country as highly corrupt and inefficient. The central issue in the

movie *Dhruvam* is the inability of the State machinery to bring justice to the people by executing Haider Marakkar. The policemen in the movie all turn out to be insensitive and worthless in varying degrees. The prison officer who receives Executioner Ramayyan speaks in a very belittling and even rude tone, right at the beginning of the movie. He is clearly corrupt and works for Haider Marakkar.

Ramayyan: *Areya thookkendath?* [Who's to be hanged?]

Officer: *Ninte achane* [Your father]

Officer to driver about Ramayyan: *Ivan thirichu chellanam ennu ippo arkka nirbandham?* [Who's particular that he has to return?]

(Qtd from film, my trans.)

Mannadiyar is far superior to even the IG and the latter adores him. On several occasions, Mannadiyar openly reproaches the IG.

Mannadiyar mocks the police for not having good revolvers, while the criminals have the latest and the best weapons. "*Thookkunnathinu munpe oru ratriyenkilum avane cellil kidathan ningalkku kazhiyumo?*" [Are you able to keep him in the cell one night at least, before he's hanged?] He asks this because Haider has manipulated the doctor and stays in the deluxe ward in the hospital. Such a mockery of the judiciary and police department appears in all the movies under scrutiny. In *Valyettan*, the DYSP Mohammad Ilyas himself indicts the other policemen several times, with speeches like: "*Edo policinte joli cheyyan thinnu kozhutha ee sareeram matram pora, buddhi koodi venam*" [Hey, to do

police work this fattened body alone won't do, you need brains too]. (Qtd from film, my trans.)

Later, Mannadiyar lectures the police on their inefficiency and tells the MLA (played by Kollam Thulasi), “*Janangalude vivarakkedu kondundaya MLA. 15 varsham munpe ente mupil occhanichu ninna ente driver. Athinum munpe ariveppukarante sahayi Chekkutty. Athinum munpe swantham ammakku polum thirichariyanavatha oru bastard.*” [An MLA created by public stupidity. 15 years ago, my ever-so-humble driver. Prior to that, Chekkutty who assisted the cook. Even before that a bastard whom own mother couldn't distinguish] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

The movie unmistakably and unapologetically prefers the feudal and wild law of Mannadiyar to the legal justice system offered by the State. That is why from the beginning, Mannadiyar's kingly benevolence and sense of justice is glorified by the IG. This valorization of the feudal law and order continues in *Valyettan*, the second Mammooty-movie scrutinized here. DYSP Mohammad Ilyas (played by Captain Raju) is a parallel of IG Marar (played by Janardhanan) in *Dhruvam*, good-hearted and highly appreciative of the hero, but inefficient compared to the hero. The bad police officers are presented in these movies as ruthless and disrespectful to law and custom. The good police officers are always presented as inefficient because they are law-abiding. The suggestion in these movies is highly rightist, that goodness is equal to inefficiency, that conforming to law is worthless. Law is perhaps to be changed and challenged by heroes or “strong men”. Thus these movies present a distorted and unfair view of social reality and justice.

The notion that in a traditional society corruption is rampant, and the ideal that the society must be changed for the better by ruthless strong men who challenge law and order is the basic idea projected in the 2004 movie *4 The People* directed by Jayaraaj, screenplay written by Jayaraaj and Iqbal Kuttippuram. Here four angry engineering students take law and order into their hands in order to reform the corrupt society. This is the ideology behind moral policing also. The ideology of the movie was so appropriate to the times that it became the highest grossing Malayalam movie of 2004 without casting a single superstar.

Following *4 The People*, in 2006 came another vigilante movie, *Chinthamani Kolacase*, depicting Lal Krishna Viradiyar (played by Suresh Gopi), an eccentric criminal lawyer who helps criminals escape from justice, and then pursues them and punishes them with vigilante justice. The movie was directed by Shaji Kailas, with a screenplay by A.K. Sajan. These movies belittle the law and order situation of the country as inefficient and corrupt, and justify individuals taking up law into their hands to set things right. This kind of crude feudal justice coupled with nationalism is endorsed in Tamil blockbuster vigilante movies of the time also, especially the movies directed by Shankar namely *Gentleman* (1993), *Indian* (1996), *Anniyan* (2005), *Sivaji* (2007), to name a few.

Like Mannadiyar, Madhavanunni also takes law and order in his own hands due to the inefficiency of the legal system. When SI Ajith Kumar (played by Subair) arrests Appu, Madhavanunni and brothers reach the police station, mundu doubled up. Madhavanunni says with sarcasm: “*Ividathe SI angunninte*

ammayi (expletive for prostitute) *iratta pettu kidakkuva. Onnu kananam. Kuttikalk oro ponnaranjanam kodukkanam*” [The venerable SI’s aunt has delivered twins. Came just to see and gift a waist chain each]. Then screams: “*Mari nilkkeda*” [Get back] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

DYSP Mohd Ilyas had already called the SI. After all, what the movie wants to say is that the police department is corrupt. Appu comes crying and bleeding. Madhavanunni goes with the SI to his house. SI is the son of Kunjiraman Nambiar who was the driver of former minister K.C. Thomas. He tells the SI who his father is. Madhavanunni wants to give maximum insult to the SI, in front of his own family. SI’s father comes running respectfully to meet Madhavanunni. It was Madhavanunni who saved the SI’s father when he had got drunk and run over a 12-year-old girl. This is a further insult to the bureaucracy, as inefficient, corrupt and careless. Madhavanunni insults the SI, beats him in front of the family, his mother cries.

Madhavan: *Enikku nonthal njan thirichu novichirikkum, karayichirikkum. Ath eth mattedathe officer ayirunnalum seri.... Police stationil vech ninte adinabhi chavitti kalakkathirunnath nee ittirikunna uniforminodulla bahumanam kondanu.* [If I’m pained, I will hurt back and make you cry, whatever be your rank. . . I didn’t knee you right at the police station only out of respect for the uniform you have worn] (Qtd from film, my trans.)

Punishment is good in the feudal system. To love is to punish. To punish is to maintain law and order and discipline. This is why Madhavanunni beats his

brothers with a leather belt and disciplines them. He also defeats Bava as an act of punishing the wrongdoer, which the State is unable to do. Fines, public shaming, mutilation of the body or death were the most common forms of feudal punishment in medieval societies. Neelakantan in *Devasuram* cuts off the arm of Sekharan after a gory battle in which Sekharan puts Neelan through unbelievable torture, and Mannadiyar in *Dhruvam* tortures and hangs Haider instead of turning him in, and gets the death sentence himself. However the magnanimous hero who can easily kill or mutilate the villain, but lets him free is also featured: Madhavanunni lets Sivaraman free and so does Jagan leave Kolappulli Appan.

In the Mohanlal-starrer *Aaram Thampuran* also, the police and bureaucracy made fun of, as helpless and impotent. In contrast to the masculinity of the feudal lords (Appan and Jagan), the police arrive after the fight and are of no use. The hero as well as Appan acts superior to them. The examples of such ineffectual police and bureaucracy are the policemen who come too late after Jagan's fight with Chenkalam Madhavan, the District Collector "Kongattukaran Eeswaranunni" (played by Sreeraman) who has a local and not-so-masculine name and who acts subservient to Jagan, and the comic Bharatan SI (played by Innocent).

Thus the feudal law is an expression of superior masculinity and is above the law of the State. The villains in these movies are also all powerful, above the power of the State, representing the absolute power of masculinity. Mundakkal Sekharan in *Devasuram* and Sivaraman in *Valyettan* are powerful representatives of blood revenge. They go to a spectacular extent to exact revenge. At the temple festival, Sekharan beats up the already battered body of Neelan ruthlessly

and tries to break his already paralysed left arm. The scene ends in a blood bath with a visual spectacle of the bloody bruised faces of the men set off against the backdrop of the temple roof, the temple lights and the velichappad. Sivaraman ties up Madhavanunni's disabled brother Sankaran and in a highly charged scene threatens to blow him up with fireworks. Such extreme attempts to take revenge have already happened several times in the past, as reminisced in the movie. Kolappulli Appanin *Aaraam Thampuran* has superhuman connections with *chathans*, while the kalari group forms his human army. The townsfolk call him *thampuran* and treat him with awe and fear. The Kalari master Apputty Nambiar (played by Bheeman Raghu) says Kolappulli Appan is indeed a *kombanana* (tusker), "*Thalakkan Kanimangalathu karayil aankuttikal undo?*" [Is there anyone man enough in Kanimangalam banks to chain him?] (Qtd from film, my trans.). The villain with the most political clout and money power is indeed Haider Marakkar in *Dhruvam*. He can go to the extent of killing the Vice President of the country at an expense of ten lakhs for getting his execution postponed. He controls and manipulates everyone, except IG Marar, Jose Nariman and Mannadiyar.

The act of giving is the ultimate expression of the feudal lord's benevolence. He can't take charity. Receiving someone's kindness and getting something as charity and not rightfully is deeply hurtful to the protagonists of these movies. Rightful possession indicates upper caste, aristocratic power positions, and being at the receiving end of kindness is a lower caste marker. Therefore Neelan is devastated to know that his life has been kindly given to him by Madhava Menon. Neelan laments addressing Madhava Menon's antique car:

Njanoru pezhachupettavananalle? Thanthayillathavan.... Bhroonahatya cheyyamayirunnille? Allenkil pirannu veenappol kazhuthu njerichu kollamayirunnille? Nadiyilozhukkukayo theevandippalathil upekshikkukayo avamayirunnille? Enthu kondu cheythilla? Mahamanaskatha! Manushyathvam.”

[So I’m born out of wedlock, fatherless! Couldn’t you have just had the embryo aborted? Or wrung the neck at the moment of birth, float it down the river or abandon in the railway tracks? Why didn’t you? Magnanimity! Humaneness!]
(Qtd from film, my trans.)

Sivaraman’s greatest trauma is that Madhavanunni not only defeats him but grants him life magnanimously. That is precisely why Madhavanunni lets him free one more time at the end of the movie. Even Jagan does not want to take any remuneration for the help he gives his friend Nandan, and does not want the *kovilakam* to be bought in his own name.

The superhero films of the 1990s, accelerated by the market forces of liberalization, upturned the centuries old struggle of Communist movements, even before its installation as a government. The much lauded Kerala model was made to vanish into thin air with the commodification of feudal culture and class solidification, which was erased with great effort and sacrifice. The individualistic family came to the centre stage in cinema, across the globe and was taken up by Malayalam cinema with great vigour. This family-centredness did not allow for a socially conscious revolutionary, which was against the safe space that globalization had created. The individual who had shrunk into the private space of the psyche reclaimed higher position in society by reliving the lost symbols of feudal glory. It was in this scenario that in December 1992,

immediately after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Joshiy's feudal overdose *Dhruvam* was released.

The hurt Savarna Hindu ethos, in the background of the Mandal Commission reports, was brought to light in *Dhruvam* that is an unabashed celebration of Brahminical symbolism, were the hurt uppercaste Hindu revenges upon the Muslim wrong doer.

Three formative news events of our lifetime came early in the 1990s – the collapse of Soviet Union and the liberalization of Indian economy, the Mandal quakes which spread naked the fault lines within us with vivid images like Rajiv Goswami burning, and the masjid coming down and the painful rise of the Indian terrorist. These events, each of them made the high earning, high spending, mostly upper caste Indian middle class redefine the way we approach the story of the human being right next to us. (“The Mindspace”)

Dhruvam was a trend-setter of the early 1990s, which was followed by a host of movies rendering a similar energy and violence of casteist assertion.

The images of Rama and Krishna, who spurn destruction upon the ill-doers, to safeguard the general goodness of the society, represented by the image of the secure middle-class family, emerged as a static metaphor in the movies of the post Neo-Liberalization era. This plotline was the launchpad of many movies of Mohanlal and Mammotty. Richard Dyer, in *Stars*, observes:

The notion of stars compensating people for qualities lacking in their lives is obviously close to the concept of stars embodying values that are under threat. The latter are presumably qualities which people have an idea of, but which they do not experience in their day-to-day lives. However, compensation implies not that an image makes one believe all over again in the threatened value, but that it shifts your attention from that value to some other, lesser, 'compensatory' one. (28)

The redundant image of the feudal superhero in these movies was a result of the consumer culture that was gulping down cultural capital in its gluttony. On the political side, the fall of Soviet Russia was taking its toll on the well being of states, in terms of justice. The savarna-centred films found villains in the self of Dalit bodies or Others like Tamilians.

The distancing of Malayalam cinema from the star-studded Tamil and Telugu cinema was due to the cultural awakening in the self of the Kerala model of governance. The middle cinema of the 1980s had laid a perfect foundation to the star system in Malayalam cinema, with the popularity these films gave the actors, Mohanalal and Mammotty. Stars emerged worldwide as the moving picture industry gained its status as a massive possibility of marketable commodity. Along the axis of consumerism, the star-value and the image of superstars emerged as a consumable product with a strong saleability. The salability was build upon interconnectedness of advertisements, magazines, gossips, et cetera.

The emergence of fan associations, across the globe, ascertained the commodification of the superstar. The stars had to carve out a niche of their own, other than their acting. The onscreen and offscreen images built by Mohanlal and Mammooty, contradicted and complimented each other and therefore, existed in their own realms as perfect commodities.

We find that fans and casual watchers pick up many points of alleged contrast between the pair, such as that we enter into an economy of a proliferation of difference and of dispersal of the star persona to cover a vast realm and to permit different audience groups to enter into relationships with the stars at different registers. (Osella and Osella 174)

Fans, not only determined the filmic narrative but also became active contributors to the commodification of the superstar identity, unique to individual actors.

Another important factor that determined the consumer star culture in Malayalam cinema is related to the migration of people from Kerala to the Middle-Eastern countries. The economical shift influenced the development models and the content of films produced. Nostalgia remained a strong presence. Cultural capital gained currency and linked economy to the aesthetics and reimagining of a Kerala identity. The economic upliftment of the middle class enabled the smooth entry of global consumer products into Kerala by means of increasing the disposable income, as well. Television, Cable and dish networks, along with video parlours that rented out movies boomed in Kerala and the state witnessed a huge consumer uprise. The gulf market also widened the possibility

of sales abroad. The superstars became the cultural exports of Kerala with the old-world feudal culture as the cultural capital.

The scene of film production, marketing and distribution took up a proper corporate method, along with the activities of fan clubs. The pre-1990s film going public did not engage in fandom because of the social awakening and intelligent sensibility of the film goers. Before fan culture took over reigns of cinema as a market, fans were butts of laughter and ridicule in movies. But the moment, fans associations took part in the active marketing and economic generation, the status turned topsy turvy.

Consumerist capitalism helped in the establishment of the fandom craze and marketability of superstar as a commodity, who represented the old-world regressive ideas. The consumeristic feudal symbols that were sold widely, using the mechanism of commodity fetish, in Malayalam cinema of the 1990s, as cultural capital, were result of a casteist Hindutva ideology that gripped the Kerala society, against the emulation-worthy Kerala Model of the Communist governments. The 'Manmohanomics', that is, the Neo Liberalization brought in the distancing of the individual from the social realities, convoluting the psyche to look only inside. This culture increased the casteist hierarchy and washed down the struggle for caste and class upliftment, creating consumers out of responsible individuals.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, a host of neo-feudal films and farcical movies were produced in the line of the superstar blockbusters of the 1990s. Many of these movies flopped badly at the box office because of the lack

of substance. Moreover, the type of feudal fetish associated with the star image and movies had changed into the urban direction. A considerable populace of Kerala, having migrated to and settled down in the cities and the permeation of the space of city and urbanity into their everyday life had diminished interest in the feudal structure of the 50s. The films modelled on the super star blockbusters of the 1990s, became redundant and lost their flavour. The character of Saroj Kumar, acted by the actor Sreenivasan, in *Udayananu Thaaram* (2005) makes fun of the larger-than-life image of Mohanlal and Mammooty presented through their 1990s films.

The early 2000s saw the commodity fetish associated with the star image in its full maturity. There were brand names associated with the superstar and actors even forayed into business. “Mohanlal’s Taste Buds” is a company started by the actor for food products. This was the full maturity of the commodity fetish that the star image as a commodity being achieved in Malayalam film industry. This is made fun of in the movie *Udayananu Tharam* by Sreenivasan’s character, who starts selling pickle and pappad, after achieving the status of a superstar. The film is also an analysis of Richard Dyer’s concept of the star as a construction.

The 2000s was a period when stars across the world had started getting associated with brand names and products. Marx’s concept of the superstructure is seen to full flourish in this context, where the market economy was ruled by the wealthy few. The success of the capitalist bourgeoisie model fused with the everyday lived experiences of the space of the city and the proletariat. This changed the dimension and mechanism of commodity fetish and the market economy. This will be discussed in detail, in the next chapter.

The 2000s saw a chasm building against the neo-feudal reversion that had crept into Malayalam cinema in the 1990s. The redundancy caused by the overdose of the superstar movies and the nostalgia of a bygone feudal celebration, and subsequent imitations paved path to a deliberate avoidance of the overused symbols of the casteist feudal past in the films released after 2000. This was but a change in the mechanism of Capitalism and the commodity fetish of the 1990s, morphed into concrete global products that had claimed siege in the Kerala economy.

Chapter Three

New Generation Resistance

Having discussed about the Malayalam films of the 1980s and 90s as vestiges of a conservative feudal social structure, the present chapter proposes to analyze the so-called New Generation films of the 2000s and onwards are considered to be considerably different in themes and treatment from the earlier films. The New Generation Malayalam film as a category was a tight slap on the face of the unrealistic and illogical feudal superstardom that began with the Neo-Liberalization. The New Generation movies, instead of, attempting to overpower the fan culture, accepted it and gave it a twist by accepting the star value and stardom in midst of objections against the preceding cinematic style and mechanism. This was very effectively democratized into a different form of commodity fetish. The status of the star, according to Richard Dyer's theory, still remained as a construction, commodity and ideology. This chapter looks into six representative films of the post 2000 era to decipher the mechanism of a capitalist consumerist society.

The chapter is centred on the hypothesis that the films of the post-globalization era are steeped in capitalistic motifs and propagate much the same rightist conservative attitudes as their predecessors. The chapter will attempt an in-depth analysis of six films from this era in terms of their thematic elements

and visual treatment. Though old wine of conservative morality was being sold in the new bottle of capitalist society, the basic structure and ethos of societal basis remained the same. The lack of agency of female roles and their position as a vessel to contain the family didn't undergo much change. This will be dealt with, in detail, in the next chapter.

The term New Generation Malayalam cinema appeared as a journalese and then entered the popular parlance in the early 2010s.

'New Generation' is a discursive term derived from media discourses, where it is used to refer to a new set of Malayalam films that represent a departure from the region's conventional style. It could never be considered as a genre, as it doesn't reflect any particular pattern of narration or filmmaking cannot be compared to French New Wave. (Gopinath)

An article that appeared in *The New Indian Express* daily on 2 July 2013 was titled "Malayalam New Generation Movies Failing to Click?" Even before this, there were discussions in magazines and television channels about the "new Generation Malayalam cinema", as in the article "Malayalam Cinema Pushes the Envelope" by M.G. Radhakrishnan that appeared in *India Today* in the 16 July 2012 issue. M.G. Radhakrishnan notes:

Once known for its arthouse movies at one end of the spectrum and semi-porn fare on the other, Malayalam cinema is now experiencing a brave new wave that is challenging established social mores. And it is being lapped up by the people – especially

the youth – even as conventional films with big budgets and superstars sink without a trace one after the other.

The new Malayalam cinema, like its Bollywood counterpart, is characterised by fresh and unusual themes; plots which are urban-centric and middle-class oriented; they are modestly budgeted, shun superstars and some are entirely shot with DSLR still cameras; and they heavily use social networking sites for online marketing.

These so-called new Malayalam movies met with harsh criticism at the beginning and were considered to be devoid of originality and artistic value. M.G. Radhakrishnan attests to this in the same article:

While admirers of the new wave of Malayalam cinema call it the Jasmine revolution, to critics it is nothing more than a multiplex revolution. ‘It is not right to call it a new wave. The movies have no social, cultural or political layers to them. These multiplex films are intended only for the consumerist urban middle class,’ says film critic B. Abubaker. ‘There is a fetish for the visuals and form than content,’ says Unnikrishnan. The more serious complaint is that most films are ‘inspired’ by non-Malayalam movies. If *Cocktail* and *Chappa Kurish* are unacknowledged adaptations of the Canadian flick *Butterfly on a Wheel* and the Korean film *Handphone*, Abu has acknowledged Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* and Sriram Raghavan’s *Ek Hasina Thi* as

inspirational to *22 Female Kottayam*. But as director Amal Neerad, 36, who debuted with the stunningly stylish *Big B* in 2007, says, ‘What is original? Haven’t we heard that even *Romeo and Juliet* was hardly an original from Shakespeare? Does it anyway lessen the value of the great bard’s work?’

The journalistic catch-phrase ‘New Generation Malayalam Cinema’ has remained in critical usage until now. Jose K. Manuel’s Malayalam book *New Generation Cinema* (2012) is an early study of the genre. Dr. Prabhakaran Pazhassi’s book, also in Malayalam language, came out the next year, and is titled *New Generation Malayala Cinema* (2013), published by Sign Books. *Cinemayum Prathyayasastravum* (2009) by V.K. Joseph is an earlier work that discusses a paradigm shift in Malayalam films but does not define the New Generation Movement. *Tharasareeravum Desacharithravum* (2012) by Muhammad Facrudeen Ali focuses on the masculine bodies of the 1990s films of Mohanlal, Mammooty and other superstars, which is being fast displaced in new (generation) films. *Vellithirayude Rashtreeyam* (2018) by Resmi G. and Anil Kumar K.S. analyses the genre of New Generation cinema in detail. Academics like Meena T. Pillai and Swapna Gopinath have also used the term in the titles of their articles on contemporary Malayalam films.

In the course of this research project, many criticisms have been received for using the term “New Generation Cinema” for it is not an accepted term in the academia yet. Wikipedia now acknowledges New Generation Cinema as a movement in Malayalam cinema. This dissertation chooses to adopt the term since the acclaimed Angry Young Man movement originated as a journalistic

catch-phrase and then got accepted in academic circles also. The New Generation movies that flourished after 2010 has many precursors and *4 the People* could be seen as the movie that brought the breakthrough.

From the 2010s, the New Generation Movement has transformed the nature of Malayalam mainstream movies. This movement dealt a knockout blow to the traditional style of movies of the Mammooty-Mohanlal superstar era, and is analogous to the French New Wave of the 1950s and 60s. In Malayalam, as in the French movement, conventional narrative techniques of film were abandoned at this time in an iconoclastic spirit. The low-budget films of this movement employed radical experimentation in character and plot construction, editing and visual style, engaged poignantly with the social and political changes of the era. These films have created a new formula for the commercial film, combining the mainstream elements with those of parallel cinema. The new generation directors like Rajesh Pillai, Aashiq Abu, Samir Thahir, Amal Neerad, Anwar Rasheed and Anjali Menon explore avant-garde filming techniques such as fragmented, discontinuous editing, and long takes to combine objective and subjective realism, and disrupt authorial centrality to create a narrative ambiguity.

New Wave actors like Fahadh Faasil, Dulquer Salman, Jayasurya, Nivin Pauly and Vineeth Sreenivasan have redefined the concept of the hero / superstar as well as masculinity, the feudal superstar idols of Mammotty, Mohanlal and a few other actors, do still exist as a nostalgia of the feudal decadence. These directors as well as actors constitute the margins of the 1980s and 90s writing to the centre, and denote the rise of a new age of youth and rebellion that is in the throes of neo-imperialist commercialism and globalization.

The New Generation movies are simple in their style and novel in the treatment of themes, and without the ensemble casting that was characteristic of the preceeding age. Local slangs, subaltern spaces, profane language and explicit treatment of theme are a few characteristics of the New Generation movies that do not come under a water-tight compartmentalization. This fluidity is what gives this category an identity in the rich history of Malayalam Cinema, but this uniqueness was a major breakthrough and shift away from the conventional narrative methods.

The technical uniqueness is manifested in different ways in different films belonging to the category of New Generation movies. This shift, brought in by a younger generation of actors and film makers was also an extension of the changes that the National and global cinema underwent. Marked by heterogeneity, New Generation movies in Malayalam, focused on urbanism and the changes brought into the life of the common man, as well as the elite class. Consumer culture, fast paced life pattern, and the city as a democratic and accessible space in public sphere were some of the backgrounds that came as the common denominators. This, also, resulted in the enhanced fetish for commodities. These films merged the formal economy to the informal economy and the corporate to the non-corporate sites of societal engagements. Another remarkable characteristic of these movies was the marked absence of the hypermasculinities that ruled the superstar culture of Malayalam cinema since the 1990s.

The globalization of capital at the end of the 20th century had far-reaching effects in society and culture. As discussed in Chapter One, it has changed the

face of science and technology, industry, medicine and lifestyle, religion and politics, and every other aspect of life. In this age of increasing commercialization, every relationship has changed under the impact of commodification and consumption. While neoliberal trade policies and free trade agreements have brought into the consuming nations an unbelievable variety and quantity of affordable goods, they have also produced very high levels of wealth accumulation for corporate, complex and largely unregulated systems of production and consumption, as well as job insecurity for billions of people around the world who form part of the globalized floating labour pool.

In the words of the Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer, culture has itself become a huge industry involving standardized products and standardized people. It can be legitimately argued that most of the Malayalam movies of the New Generation Movement depict various manifestations of the Malayali man in his struggle for survival in an indifferent world, who pursue money and luxury in a race to fulfill their dreams, and finally falter and learn bitter lessons, like the characters played by Fahadh Faasil in movies like *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), *Diamond Necklace* (2012), *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), and *Carbon* (2018).

Even as globalization of capitalism seems to offer innumerable opportunities to the new generation youth, globalization also enslaves humanity to uncontrolled desire and consumption, destroys natural life beyond recovery and presents a desperate crisis before the youth. There are worldwide resistance movements that are anti-globalization and anti-consumerist focusing on human rights, fair trade and sustainable development. At this time of financial, political

and social struggles for survival, when men struggle under professional and personal pressures in the society, sociologists have identified a development termed “masculinity in crisis”.

Among many others, Peter McAllister’s *Manthropology* (2010) is a satirical and entertaining book on how the highly scientific and technological society has led to the emasculation of modern man. Seen in this light, the protagonists of the New Generation Malayalam movies constitute a departure from the earlier depictions of masculinity in its portrayal of powerless, effeminate and insecure men. It is my contention that these new, deconstructive representations of masculinity denote the weakening of the nation-state within a globalized corporate scenario. Masculine heroism was conveyed in the movies of the earlier era with techniques like extreme close-ups, punch-lines, BGM action, and so on where the superstar image was linked to the excesses of a feudal, capitalist culture. The New Generation movies represent anonymous individuals reeling under the oppressive unfulfillable dreams forced on to them by a corporate capitalist culture.

There is a progression discernible in the development of the New Generation heroes as the stark opposite of the superheroes played by Mohanlal and Mammooty. Actors like Fahadh Faasil, Jayasurya and Asif Ali present an extreme opposite of the superheroes – they sport a character and a male body that is the Other of the ideal of masculinity. These actors embody the antiheroic common man who is far removed from superstardom – they do not speak punch-dialogues, get more thrashing than they give anyone, they do not indulge in any display of masculinity, and are not the epitome of goodness. Fahadh Faasil in

Njan Prakashan and *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, Jayasurya in *Trivandrum Lodge*, and Asif Ali in *Traffic* are good examples. Nivin Pauly is closer to the male ideal, and emerged as a youth icon with films like *Premam* (2015), *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016), and *Action Hero Biju* (2016) in which the central protagonist struggles against a hostile world. Dulquer Salmaan is a symbol of New Age masculinity, and has played the powerful, unconventional man in films like *Ustad Hotel* (2012), *Bangalore Days* (2014), *Charlie* (2015) and *Kali* (2016). The shift in Malayalam films towards the metrosexual culture was noted in as early as 14 June 2012 in an article that appeared in *The New Indian Express* titled “Malayalam Movies Turn Urban-Centric.”

As the term new generation is usually used to refer to the continuities and gaps between generations, it also invokes a sense of age, as referring to young people. Rather than reducing it into the sense of an age differential, an attempt has to be made to read it historically as signifying an ongoing transformation of social values and structures. In literature and cinema, generation, or generational difference and the conflict associated with it more specifically, has been a trope for expressing ideological resolution for the problems posed by modernity. (Kadavath)

Urbanism was late to be represented on screen in Kerala. The wonderment of urbanity was carried in the movies till the 1990s, as a contrast to the good rural life. This had brought the city as the evil other. The new generation movies presented city as an active trope and narrated stories of people who existed in that space, across their class and caste. This is not to say that cities were democratic

spaces. Cities represented the inequality on a vivid glaring spectrum. The spatiality of the city was clearly marked in the new generation movies. This will be analyzed in detail, later, in this chapter. *4 the People* (2004), *Diamond Necklace* (2012), *Bangalore Days* (2014), *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016), *Chappakurish* (2011) and *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013) are movies to be discussed in this chapter for the presentation of consumer capitalism, which came very naturally to a generation that grew up in the 1990s and was unaware of the political struggle of the pre-1990s era.

The early 2000s saw movies seeped into the feudal structures marketed by the capitalist economy. Many imitations of the Mohanlal-Mammooty starrer superhero movies of the 1990s were released in the first few years of the 2000s. The change in the global work force and the settlement of people who had migrated across and out of the country had started participating in the active involvement of commodity fetish of the movies. The concept of the common man and the everyday experiences became prominent and started ruling the film production. The increased consumption based on the satellite channels, cable television, CDs and DVDs, along with the film festival culture, had democratized not only the reception but production and distribution of films.

4 the People is a movie born out of this phenomenon in Kerala. Another significant example of the global market culture could be understood by the phases of production through which *4 the People* underwent. The parts of the film were first shot in Tamil and was retained so in the final Malayalam version. The fluidity of the film market is the trademark of the capitalist scene. The movie marks a stark variation from the movies till its date of release. *4 the People* gave

an upliftment to the youth culture of Kerala. The film that tells the story of a youth uprising by four male students of Engineering, is a crystal-clear reversal of the films with a larger-than-life, hypermasculine single super hero. The four students in *4 the People* find it their moral responsibility to fight against corruption and injustice by retorting to undemocratic ways. *4 the People* presents these as morally right by showing the public support that these four boys gain to the level of emerging as the youth icons. This film of utopian ideals, follows the paths of the movies of the 1980s that vouched for politics as a corrupt system that is not needed for society.

The difference that *4 the People* made on the commercial movie market was mainly due to the shift in focus from a single hero to that of the common man vigilante. The film, except for the two final scenes, where they confront the minister and his son, the faces of the four men are not shown and their actions are not celebrated for heroism like the hypermasculine superhero movies of the 1990s. The four men are shown donning black leather jackets, trousers and helmets. The uniform colour and hidden faces represent the anonymity of the common man or any man. The four men are also not given heavy laden dialogues embellished with moral messages or valour. The technique of photography, editing and shot composition in *4 the People* are unlike the films of those times. Thus, the film could be said to be one that is first of sorts. Outstanding features of the film include constant cross-editing and large shots, compared to the unabashed close-ups of the 1990s super hero movies. The western musically style, brought in by Jassie Gift, the lyricist-singer-musician of *4 the People* was an important factor for the popularity of the movie. The cosmopolitan culture of

the rap song and English lyrics and music spread across the movie, not only in songs, gave it a massive outreach among the youth. The camera focused on the everyday city life and common people who had started working in Multinational companies as well as on the road. These came as fresh air in the scene of commercial Malayalam cinema. The black leather jackets look of the four boys on bike reminds one of the motorcycle gangs of America of the 1950s. The cosmopolitan looks carried by the actors, in the movie places it on an ideal benchmark for the youth to emulate. *4 the People* was a huge success in the box office.

Most of the frames of *4 the People* show the everyday urban space in all its naturality. The shots are, mostly, crowded with people, unlike the single person focus of the superstar movies of the 1990s. The youth culture of the multitude and the larger frames with sky as the background do contrast the closed spaces of the superstar movies of the earlier decade, but in their roles as makers of change, the four men reach the similar status of the all-destroyer gods of the Hindu mythology who destroys to maintain the balance of the universe and bring in good. This is in strict abeyance with the ideology of the superstar movies of the 1990s.

The patriarchal upper caste ideology is spread across the movie. The city is clearly divided into two – the glamorous consumerist world belonging to the upper class and the other the shady, inferior, narrow spaces of the vestiges, resided by the lower class who aspires towards the higher ideals put forth by the consumerist market. In more than one context the cultured, middleclass belonging to the upper caste are shown in constant dismay. In a scene, where a

quotation goon threatens a family to evacuate an apartment they reside in, shows the caste dynamics inherent to *4 the People*. The lower class/lower caste goons threaten and harm two weak men with the sacred sandal wood paste on their forehead and a white thread of Brahmin identity across the chest. On being threatened, the weak brahmin men request the goons to sanction them time for another month so that they have a proper place for the son to study during his exams. This scene culminates upon a brass idol of a Hindu Goddess, with three weak poor men cuddled among each other, in their agony.

The plight of the humble Brahmin who has been robbed off status and economic wealth is an often-repeated theme in the films of Jayaraj. This hints to the landmark abolition of the feudal system and the Land Reforms Bill passed by the first Communist government in Kerala. This points again to the same ideology that the superstar movies of the 1990s had established through the celebration of feudalism. The commodity fetish in the self of feudal artefact lies deep within *4 the People*. The scenes of the illegal activities in *4 the People* are set in the background of closed factories or the harbour. This could be seen as an interpretation of a failed modernity, thereby, asserting the value of a past feudal structure. Jayaraj, through a seemingly secular film, celebrates the Right wing ideology of Brahminical and ritualistic Hindu culture.

The revealing of the identity of the four men is an open sling at the politics of the state, where ideals do not exist anymore. SP Rajan Mathew, after searching at the houses of the four students, reports to his senior, “*Avarkku pinnil aethenkilum bheekara sanghadana undenn njan vishwasikkunnilla. Orotharkkum specific family history und. Rashtreeyavum, criminals um chernnu nashippicha*

naalu kudumbangal” [I don’t believe there is any terrorist organization behind them. Each one of them has a specific family history. Four families destroyed by politics and criminals.] (Qtd from film, my trans.). The film is replete with such statements and reports that the present political system of democracy is of no good, while smuggling the Right Wing agenda under the cover of corruption. Even while, carrying out a revolution, the men believe in the ideals of a happy family, good job and bright future. This mismatch could be seen as the ideal message of a capitalist society.

The patriarchal ideology is inherent in the shots where opinions of people about the four-men gang and their deeds are taken. An old fish-seller woman says, “*ippozhalle mone, anungalude usher kandath. Ithokke pande cheyyendi irunnatha* [Now, we see the vigour of men. This had to be done long back.]” (Qtd from the film, my trans.). Into the second half, when two of the four men get into a heated argument over doing off with the soft emotions of love, the character of Eashwar Iyer comments, “*Ithe, aanungalude kaliya*” [This is a man’s game] and shuns Vivek. The inherent message is the age-old celebration of the male valour. The celebration of masculine glory and power runs throughout the movie as an undercurrent. Even in the final scene, where a new group of four is formed at the failure of the earlier four, it had to be men.

In spite of this a welcome change is the final scene where the first four-men-gang is caught by the Police and they display loud weeping and wailing. The failure of their mission, unlike the achievements of the heroes of the earlier hypermasculine films and the ineffective failed revolt are solid deviations from the cinematic norms of the past. The superseding of the four pioneer men by

another group of anonymous four, in achieving the purpose and proving heroism was a novel sight in Malayalam films, that were too used to the diegetic of superhero stars.

Women characters in *4 the People* do not have any role of significance and are politically non-existing. The wife of SP Rajan Mathew and his sister are always shown as subjugated identities. They are seen serving the man in the house and if ever, they make any comments or pass opinions on the gang or their actions, they are shunned as idiotic or their actions are shown as mere outburst of the citizen's angst. When his wife and sister support the gang, SP Rajan Mathew says, "*Painkili pennungalude oru support um!*" [The support of sentimental women!] (Qtd from film, my trans.) There is female objectification in the song, *Ninte mizhimuna...* where one scarcely clad woman dances to lewd lyrics and a voyeuristic camera. *4 the People*, sold the Hindutva agenda in a cosmopolitan cover by enabling its reach and popularity.

The movies of Mohanlal and Mammooty discussed in the previous chapter emerged from a feudal social structure and the basic formula was the narrative to be grounded in a dichotomy of good and evil where the hero would invariably represent the good in direct and indirect ways and eventually fight against and defeat the exponents of vice. In such an allegorical narrative pattern, the protagonists would be depicted with superhuman qualities, capable of arresting and destroying the uncontrolled progression of evil. Such a hero stands outside the corrupt system and by uprooting evil, reestablishes order in the system. Many of the characters played by Fahadh Faasil have the reverse progression. Their journey is inward and self-transformatory, not outward into

the society to change the social structure. They are not burdened by the pressure to change the system. Instead of influencing the social structure, they are influenced by it; instead of changing others, they are changed by others. At the end of the film narrative, these characters come to a self-realization that true love and sharing are better in this world than the frenzied pursuit of physical and material pleasures. Such a self-transformation defines not only Dr. Arun, Aymanam Sidharthan and Prakashan, but also the OCD-stricken Harikrishnan in *24 North Kaatham*, Goutham in *Role Models*, and so on.

There is a unique multidimensionality of characterization discernible in New Generation films in Malayalam. Stepping down from the monolithic absolutes of superheroism, the contemporary actors now play multiple, intersecting and conflictual roles within a single film narrative, evolving, learning and becoming, rather than being. The protagonist is hence at once the hero as well as villain, lover and manipulator, victimizer and victim. This represents a globalized society in the grips of socio-political anarchy, a society that has lost its traditional values and follows the logic of the commercial market. The New Wave protagonists in general have identities shaped by their profit motive, commercial possibilities, social media presence, superficial appearances and spectacle rooted in an apolitical, ahistorical, present-day culture that is individual-centric and consumption-centric. These characters do not believe in past lessons or future changes, and live in the present moment.

One actor who is considered representative of the new generation Malayalam movies and represented the ethos of the twenty-first century is Fahadh Faasil, who made it grand in his second innings in film industry. His first

film, in the 1990s was a failure. The dissertation, now, moves on to examine the characters played by Fahadh Faasil as representative of a capitalist consumerist culture portrayed in the New Generation films in Malayalam, which overturned the “superstar era” of the 1980s and early 90s. These characters like Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), Cyril in *22 Female Kottayam* (2012), Dr. Arun in *Diamond Necklace* (2012), Prasad in *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), Prakashan in *Njan Prakashan* (2018) and Sibi in *Carbon* (2018) are characterized by desire for materialistic pleasures and a luxurious life. Though the character undergoes moral erosion in order to attain material gains, he also gets transformed at the end due to the influence of certain individuals or experiences. These characters are defined by self-deception and hypocrisy that is characteristic of an amoral, competitive, double-faced and decadent society that goes to any extent to survive.

In *22FK*, Cyril hides an opportunistic and manipulative self within a polished and civilized exterior. Even when he loves the heroine (Rima Kallingal) in an apparently innocent and tender manner, he has the cunning to plan to present her to his boss (Pratap Pothan) for his own selfish gain. When the heroine turns out to be a threat to himself and his boss, he goes to the extent of trapping her in a narcotics case and getting her behind bars. Another Fahadh character with a deceptive charm is run in *Diamond Necklace*. He represents the globalized generation that has a transnational culture of luxury, and physical pleasure and sexual laxity. Every single choice, value and action in his consumerist life is completely dominated by plastic money. Arjun in *Chaappa*

Kurishu is also reveling in sexual and moral laxity, pursuing relationships with his fiancée (Roma) and his secretary (Remya Nambisan) at the same time.

Many Fahadh characters are greedy for money and attempt to get rich by shortcuts. Sibi in *Carbon*, Prakashan in *Njan Prakashan* and Aymanam Sidharthan in *Oru Indian Pranayakatha* are examples. Sibi in *Carbon* will not follow the official and socially acceptable ways of making money and tries alternate ways of a parallel economy by illegally selling precious stones and silver owls. But he does not succeed in any of these attempts. The film pursues his attempt to work as an estate manager in the middle of a dense jungle, where he gets attracted by the rumour of a great treasure dangerously hidden in a spot on the jungle called Thalakani. Similar to Sibi, Prakashan in *Njan Prakashan* is also characterized by avarice. He tries to use his former lover Salomi who is going to fly to Germany as a nurse, but is in turn cheated by Salomi. The failed selfishness of Prakashan is reminiscent of the protagonists in *Chaappa Kurishu*, *Diamond Necklace* and *Carbon*.

The self-centred introversion of Fahadh characters is to be seen in relation with the deep-seated insecurities of existence in a globalized era. The characters Harikrishnan in *24 North Kaatham* (2012) and Aby in *Varathan* (2018) can be taken as the best examples. Harikrishnan is a geeky software architect who is a genius at work but asocial in nature due to his emotional outbursts and odd mannerisms. He has to undertake an unexpected journey with Narayani (Swathi Reddy) which becomes a tremendous learning experience for him. Aby is a mild character who cannot kill even a cockroach but is forced to retaliate against the villains who abuse his wife Priya (Aiswarya Lekshmi) in a truly superhero

manner, in what can be considered a satiric subversion of the superhero narratives. The personality disorder and insecurities that characterize Fahadh characters reach the peak in the character Shammi in *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019). Apparently a powerful patriarch, Shammi's confidence and masculinity turn out to be symptoms of acute mental disorder in a mockery not only of masculinity and patriarchy but also the superhero movie traditions.

The selfishness and greed of the new generation protagonists is interpreted as "practicality" in *Oru Indian Pranayakatha*. Aymanam Sidharthan's philosophy is that he will have to reach high in order to secure his life. To procure wealth and power, he loves the daughter of a wealthy gold merchant. This character is a satirical dig at the pampered globalized youth of contemporary times in his refusal to travel in buses, to work in a petrol pump, in his refusal to complete his education and in his political ambitions. Such practical tactics for survival reflect a corrupt and immoral system where straightforward people cannot survive. Corruption and moral laxity are indeed the hallmarks of a late capitalist globalized society. There have been numerous studies across the world that examine the increased prevalence of corruption in a globalized society. Alfredo Rehren from Chile in the article "Globalization and Corruption" discusses how political corruption emerged in the 80s and 90s along with globalization and democratization:

With globalization fundamental changes took place in the business world including deregulation, mergers, takeovers, de-unionization, displacement of industrial activity to less developed countries and expansion of financial markets. The globalization of the political

economy incorporated new markets, giving business the opportunity to expand operations and profits worldwide in a much more competitive environment. Privatization of state enterprises, participation of the private sector in the delivery of social services, administration of public infrastructure, public utilities, energy resources and expansion of private banking made international competition fierce. With the expansion and diversification of world trade, corruption became enmeshed in a myriad of autonomous networks operating across countries and business in the developed and developing world, where subcontracting and outsourcing are the core of a new international productive scheme.

(4-5)

Viennese economists Harald Badinger and Elisabeth Nindl have also examined the issue in the paper “Globalization, Inequality and Corruption”. They have given a comprehensive overview of studies in economics that explore political corruption-globalization nexus that is linked to social inequality that is bred by globalization.

In spite of all these, it should also be noted that Fahadh Faasil has presented characters in films like *Take Off*, *Annam Rasoolam*, *Amen* and *Iyyobinte Pusthakam* who do not conform to these principles detailed here. Fahadh has a tremendous range in his acting and characters made possible by his body language, mannerisms and gestures.

This chapter analyses select Malayalam films of the post-globalization era (after 2000), mainly 4 *The People* (2004), *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), *Diamond Necklace Brought to You by Joy Alukkas* (2012), *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013), *Bangalore Days* (2014) and *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016). All these films are structured around the theme of money / business / consumption and depict a traditional / rustic social order and values disappearing under the onslaught of globalized capitalism, social development and amoral metropolitan life. *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), a low budget film shot entirely on Canon 5D and 7D DSLR cameras, tells the story of a rich man, Arjun (Fahadh Faasil) losing his iPhone which is kept by the poor supermarket employee Ansari (Vineeth Sreenivasan). The film continuously juxtaposes the luxurious and amoral life of Arjun with the stringent, squalid and oppressed life of Ansari.

Arjun's apartment, office, lifestyle, automobiles, electronic gadgets and his business career are all in stark opposition to Ansari's cleaning job in Big Mart Supermarket, under the strict supervision of Martin (Sunil Sukhada), and life in a shack. Living a life steeped in materialism, Arjun does not care much for any relationship, whether it is his fiancée Ann or his parents, or his girlfriends Sonia or Lekshmi. The two characters Arjun and Ansari stand at the two ends of the globalized capitalist society, highlighting the social inequality that is bred by the system. Arjun's arrogance and over-confidence in his power in being a rich, educated metro-professional gets rudely spurned when Ansari finds a strange empowerment in his possession of the expensive iPhone, a feeling of confidence and independence of spirit that continues in him even after he returns the phone to its rightful owner. Though Arjun seeks out Ansari at the end and beats him up,

he emerges as a better person who values relationships over gadgets and consumer products.

As in *Chaappa Kurishu*, in *Diamond Necklace* (2012) also there is the dichotomy between the rich man (Dr. Arun played by Fahadh Faasil) faltering in the pursuit of his desires and materialistic needs and the poor rustic man (Venu played by Sreenivasan) who understands the value of money as well as human relationships. Dr. Arun is steeped in a life of consumption and amoral pursuit of pleasures where cars, lifestyle products and women are all consumable products for him over which he has squandered his money and has fallen deep into debt. It is significant that the very film *Diamond Necklace* is a commodity produced by the wealthy gold merchant Joy Alukkas for their own marketing purposes. Like Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu*, Arun in *Diamond Necklace* also does not care much for his Kerala culture or even his mother back home in the village; neither does he care for relationships until he learns his lessons at the end of the narrative. On the other side of globalized, transnational life in Dubai is the poor Gulf-Malayali Venu who lives with his friends in a ghetto-like dormitory and somehow saves enough money to send home to his family in Kerala. When Arun escapes from fulfilling Venu's simple wish of showing his Malayali friends around in Burj Khalifa, Venu takes upon himself the much larger responsibility of giving Arun a comfortable bed to sleep in and even to repay Arun's debts. Another foil character to Arun is his rustic and simple wife Rajasree (Anusree) who at the end emerges as a strong character who loves her husband more than her diamond necklace.

The theme of the new generation youth's desire for easy money and easy living is satirized in the film *Indian Rupee* (2011) in the story of J.P. (Prithviraj Sukumaran)'s desperate attempts to make a fortune by treachery and manipulation. The protagonist learns a few lessons on life values and turns to an honest life at the end. In the fantasy-satire *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* (2010), the shortcuts to success and a good name take the form of the protagonist trying to bribe politicians and buy a Padmashree award. The film, as may be expected, asserts the futility of such immoral attempts to get money, social status and acceptability.

Another movie that valorizes an honest hardworking living with community consciousness as against the globalized society's penchant for shortcuts to moneymaking is *How Old Are You?* (2014) which is also remarkable for being a woman-centred film. The film tells the story of how a 36-year-old woman Nirupama Rajeev (Manju Warriar) starts an enterprising life when she encourages her neighbours to cultivate organic vegetables in their rooftops and balconies, thus embarking on the business of healthy food. This movie connected with the middle class audiences very well and propelled Manju Warriar to superstardom after her return to the industry following a controversial divorce from superstar Dileep. The film *Vinodayatra* (2007) which was released much before these two films also centred on the plot of an irresponsible, aimless young MCA graduate (Vinod) learning lessons from life, and this journey of Vinod is alluded to in the title itself. Arun in *Diamond Necklace* and Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* can be regarded as successors of this character.

In many ways, these movies assert the importance of the individual's character and choice in attaining success in life, and show the character as evolving from being immoral, weak or directionless into being powerless and righteous. This transformation of the ordinary man into a virtuous hero is best exemplified in the later Fahadh Faasil film *Varathan* (2018) where a meek tender-hearted man evolves into a fighter and singlehandedly defeats the goons who attacked his wife. The revenge of the ordinary, meek man against the inhuman villain or the inhuman system is also seen in a different way in the earlier film *Maheshinte Prathikaram* (2016). This is the formula of action movies, drawn especially from the Tamil film tradition. The significance of the New Wave Malayalam films is that these are not action movies though they employ this formula – these films are a blend of parallel films and satires and emphasize throughout the narrative not the heroic stature of the protagonist, but his anti-heroic stance.

That the protagonists in these films appear as “ordinary” men who the audiences can identify with is an important political aspect of these films. In the 2000s, at the same time as the New Wave in Malayalam, there was a similar paradigm shift in Bollywood and Tamil cinema as well. The New Wave Hindi actors like Raj Kumar Rao, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Irrfan Khan, Pankaj Tripathi, and Aparshakti Khurana effected a rebellion against the superhero age of the Khans in Bollywood. Even as the films of the superhero era appeared as rebelling against the Establishment, they were presenting us with images and symbols that legitimized the patriarchal, rightist attitudes, as seen in Chapter 3.

However, there is a triumph of the ordinary to a large extent in New Wave films which nevertheless underscore a capitalist ethos in subtle ways.

The theme of idyllic rustic life versus the corruptions of urbanity and material development runs deep in *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013) also. The film revolves around a small-scale local shopkeeper in a North Kerala village, Kunjananthan (Mammootty), being displaced and his shop destroyed by the impending construction of a highway signalling development and urbanization. Kunjananthan represents the goodness of the conservative rustic man while his wife Chithra (Nyla Usha) upholds the aspirations of the middle class for better living conditions and more opportunities guaranteed by urban development. The marital problem between Kunjananthan and Chithra represents the clash between two cultures, and two generations in India, caught in the throes of globalization and urbanization. In a larger social angle, this film comments upon the destruction of small businessmen and local economies by the globalized multinational corporations and corporates in post-liberalization India.

While the films mentioned above examine the negative aspects of a globalized economy, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016), a film released much later, presents the struggles of a virtuous and successful man and his son to protect their business empire from the corruption and betrayals of the metropolis. With hard work and professionalism, Jacob (Renji Paniker)'s son Jerry (Nivin Pauly) overcomes the financial losses faced by his father on account of his genuineness and trust in his business partner. Jacob's family traverses the two extremes depicted in the earlier movies – of extreme material success on the one hand and of financial deprivation and resultant social ostracization on the other. This film

buttresses the capitalist notions of success and happiness as synonymous with materialist gain and urbanization.

The dream of the average Malayali is projected as the making of money in metropolises like Bombay or Dubai. Such a man who makes money and takes care of his family falls into the ideal of the “self-made man”, a cultural archetype deeply rooted in American capitalism and related to the American Dream. Irvin G. Wyllie, in his 1954 book *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches*, discussed the importance of this ideal, drawing from early figures like Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass. Like *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* which is centred on the ideal of the “self-made man”, *Diamond Necklace*, *Bangalore Days* and many more films of the post-2000 era present elements of, or criticism of, this ideal.

The city has been a poignant trope in literature since the beginning of modernity, characterized by anonymity, darkness, vastness and mechanization. The metropolis has been described by the theorist Doreen Massey as “intersections of multiple narratives” (167) and is at once an attraction and a repulsion. The fast-paced life of the city breeds loneliness and fear as well as desire and artificiality, and can be seen to alienate the modern man from his identity and essence. German sociologist Georg Simmel, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903), made a seminal study of the modern city in relation to the psychological (in)stability of the modern man. The book opens with the following observation:

The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence. The eighteenth century may have called for liberation from all the ties which grew up historically in politics, in religion, in morality and in economics in order to permit the original natural virtue of man, which is equal in everyone, to develop without inhibition; the nineteenth century may have sought to promote, in addition to man's freedom, his individuality (which is connected with the division of labor) and his achievements which make him unique and indispensable but which at the same time make him so much the more dependent on the complementary activity of others; Nietzsche may have seen the relentless struggle of the individual as the prerequisite for his full development, while socialism found the same thing in the suppression of all competition – but in each of these the same fundamental motive was at work, namely the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism. (11)

A very major study of urban identity and community in twentieth century literary and film texts in the context of theorizations of modernism, postmodernism,

postcoloniality and globalization has been done by the British film scholar and cultural theorist Peter Brooker, titled *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations*. Brooker studies the modern city in terms of a space-time interrelationship where the local and the global as well as the past and the future co-exist. In other words, the metropolis is a space where conventional boundaries are blurred, and represents the ideals of a perfect life and a perfect future, and the vision of these ideals can prove to be illusory and frustrating.

The globalized city emerges in these movies as a powerful metaphor of a particular lifestyle and culture. It is dominated by mass produced goods from multinational corporations, the dominance of media and communications technologies, expensive educational and medical care, high-profile business interventions, and so on. All these elements are found in the films under scrutiny here, establishing metro-life as better than a rustic life and more covetable. The luxurious, Westernized lifestyle of Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* and Arun in *Diamond Necklace* are cases in point.

The entire narrative of *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* revolves around the business enterprise of Jerry that brings out the city as a callous, impersonal and even inhuman space as well as teeming with opportunities. The comforts enjoyed by Jacob's family such as expensive cars, clothes and gadgets, the prospects of doing MBA in London, and so on turn out to be ephemeral when bad times fall on the family, but it also turns out that they can win back all they have lost with hard work and perseverance because the globalized city offers prospects of growth just as it suddenly takes away comforts and luxuries.

Even in the small village of Vattippuram in Kasaragod district in *Kunjananthante Kada*, there is globalization in the form of Kellogg's Oats that Chithra takes from her husband's shop and a four-lane highway that will be built with World Bank funds. Despite all the resistance Kunjananthan puts up against the road-widening project, and pleads with the government officer that locals like him should not be uprooted but only replanted, the narrative makes him realize and accept the importance and inevitability of the project when he has to rush his own son to hospital and gets stuck in a traffic jam. Expensive and commodified hospital care forms an important aspect of *Diamond Necklace*, in which the protagonist Arun is a doctor who is careless about his profession, and Maya, another important character, is seriously ill and undergoes treatment and convalescence.

Right at the beginning of *Jacobinte Swargarajyam*, the metropolis of Dubai is valorized by the steel tycoon Jacob in his conversation with Jerry. Showing a rather impatient Jerry the sand dunes, Jacob says that some 60 years ago, Dubai was a desert like this, and that it is the dreams, vision and hard work of thousands of people that made the metropolis what it is today. In a powerful moment of foresight, Jacob tells his son that one day he will see big buildings and cities rise in front of him in this desert. This city is the heaven of the ambitious youth and presents to them the dream of success. Bangalore in *Bangalore Days* is also such a dreamland, symbolizing freedom, pleasure, money and success, not only for the young friends Divya (Nazriya Nazim), Arjun (Dulquer Salmaan), and Krishnan or Kuttan (Nivin Pauly), but also Krishnan's mother, while Krishnan's father finds haven in Goa.

Krishnan's mother finds her dreamland in America, while Sarah's mother tries to push her into a better life in Australia. Das (Fahadh Faasil) in *Bangalore Days* had a perfect life with the bikers and his sweetheart Natasha, when things go wrong with the death of Natasha in an accident. And the city also gives him another life in the form of Divya. The city is also the dreamland of the Gulf-Malayali. There are two stereotypes of Gulf-Malayalis: the indulgent man who lives an excessive, consumerist life, and the "good" hardworking man who sacrifices even his comforts to save enough money for his family. These two extremes are however rooted in the same materialistic culture, for both, in two different ways, exploit the materialist possibilities of the metropolis for gratification.

The city, with all its challenges and traps, is synonymous with home, luxury, wealth, success and happiness. It is in the city that Jerry is able to build up his family's life and future once again; it is in the city that Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* finds his best times, as seen from the opening sequence of the movie itself; it is in the lap of the city that Dr. Arun in *Diamond Necklace* finds himself when his credit cards and friends all fail him. At the beginning of *Chaappa Kurishu* we find Arjun and his friend Tony (Juni Joseph) in the bar, brilliant with multicoloured disco lights. This visual composition of the sequence establishes the urban and excessive life of the protagonist Arjun. The Arjun sequences in the movie also involve a lot of scenes inside cars with the streets and shops buzzing past, as well as aerial shots from skyscrapers of the world below. Such aerial shots depicting an upper class life are also employed in *Diamond Necklace* which is set in Dubai. The scenes of Ansari's life are all literally down to earth,

representing his reality. [This dichotomy is there in *Kunjananthante Kada* also where the protagonist gets hallucinations of the city and its busy highways tearing apart his village roads and shop.] However, when Ansari gets Arjun to slap Martin, Ansari is on top of a building, looking down at Arjun. Here obviously, the camera angle denotes that the roles have reversed.

In *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* also the city and its possibilities are glamorized visually. The pan shots of the city, aerial as well as low angle shots of Jerry looking up at the sky / skyscrapers, the night lights, the heavy flow of expensive cars in traffic all appear numerous times in the narrative. In all these movies, relationships are defined in the setting of the plush interior views of shopping malls, coffee shops, luxurious offices, beside swimming pools, and other spaces frequented by wealthy, “successful” people. Even the lower class, “ordinary” men like Ansari and Kunjananthan are at the end of the narrative empowered by aligning themselves with the wealthy and powerful cultures—Ansari feels empowered when he possesses the expensive phone and teaches Arjun a lesson; Kunjananthan gives up his adamant protest against road widening and leaves his shop to become part of the upcoming city.

There are some elements of the city that repeatedly appear in these films that symbolically evoke the ambivalences of the metropolis. The networks of communication and transport, the spaces such as the roads with the rush of traffic, the crowds, the shopping malls, and high-rise buildings define the metropolis in one way, while the cities also engender loneliness, paranoia, degeneration and fear. The city is the realm where the new age Fall of Man happens, due to consumerism, pride, amorality and materialism. The diasporic

floating population of the city, or its ethnoscape, as Arjun Appadurai called it, does not belong here, and is constantly shifting. Ethnoscape is a term coined by Arjun Appadurai in his essay “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (1990). One of five such terms, ethnoscape is defined as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (33). The city is also where the characters undergo a painful and inevitable process of self-realization and claim rightful place, like Arjun in *Bangalore Days* claims Sarah in the last moment, just as she was being sent off to Sydney in Australia.

Among the significant city-spaces represented in all these films are the shops, department stores and supermarkets, and the shopping malls. Many scenes in *Diamond Necklace* are set in the shopping malls in Dubai, which is the shopper’s paradise. Dr. Arun has been shopping at these malls and spending a fortune on cars and gadgets, and finally his plastic money is exhausted. Arun’s wife Rajasree shops for western clothes in these malls and realizes that her husband’s numerous credit cards cannot help her buy these goods. Maya sees Arun in a mall, and Dr. Savithri, Arun’s senior colleague shops with Arun in the mall and pays for his purchases. The mall here represents false identities and aspirations, unfulfillable dreams and desires. It is not a complete gratification of one’s desires that happens in the mall, but a burgeoning of these desires.

The mall also represents the meeting of many cultures – the mall is frequented by a multicultural community of shoppers who are equalized in a

universal mall culture; the mall also makes a multicultural life possible as exemplified by the very traditional Kerala girl Rajasree possibly transformed into a metrocultural life by her wearing western clothes. This transformation is directly addressed in *Bangalore Days* when Krishnan's rustic mother (Kalpana) becomes easily "modernized" by her Bangalore days, while Krishnan marries a foreigner Michelle (Paris Laxmi) who is more traditional Malayali in attire and attitudes than Malayalis. An unmistakable example of globalized culture.

The shopping mall plays a symbolic role in *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* as well. In the heights of success, wealth and happiness, Jacob and family visit malls, use expensive products like formal clothes (which are praised by Jacob as an essential element of professional success) that are bought from malls, and Jacob envisages the future when big buildings and malls rise out of the dry sands of the desert.

Mall culture is inextricably connected with commodification and objectification. In *Diamond Necklace* and *Chaappa Kurishu*, as in other films of the time like *22 Female Kottayam*, the metrosexual male protagonists exploit women and treat them as objects of sexual gratification. The relationship with parents is also meaningless as long as Arjun/Arun is steeped in the attractions of the materialistic city. Maya is rejected in love by Arjun and undertakes a spiritual journey as an easy solution to her problems. That solution is also in effect turning spirituality into a commodity that can be bought and possessed in an easy way. Hospital is a major presence in some of the films under scrutiny here. In *Diamond Necklace*, hospital is a major setting, and Arun and Savithri are providers, and Maya as well as Arun's mother are consumers, of hospital

services. Hospitals commodify health and human bodies in the globalized world. It is worth mentioning here a significant Malayalam film of the post-liberalization era that has examined the exploitation and corruption of the health industry—*Apothecary* (2014). *Diamond Necklace* also offers an alternative to the corrupt system of healthcare. Lakshmi the innocent and good-hearted Tamil girl is struggling to build a rustic hospital in her home village and also enjoys working at the hospital's Rural Centre. Sincerity and genuine care has not completely died out or gone out of fashion yet. There is still hope.

While relationships turn into commodities, commodities take over people's lives. Cell phones and cars are a rather negative presence in almost all the movies. An iPhone as representative of an amoral elite class is the central motif in *Chaappa Kurishu*. Arun misuses the cell phone to take erotic videos of Sonia and eventually someone else misuses the video and it becomes viral online, almost wrecking their lives. In *Kunjananthante Kada*, the cell phone is a symbol of Chithra's modern, urban aspirations which are constantly at odds with her husband's culture and values. Kunjananthan criticizes her use of the cell phone and her chatting with people in the social media. However, the cell phone also represents Chithra's independent thinking and confidence in her dreams. The cell phone in *Chaappa Kurishu* is a means of empowerment for Ansari and his personality changes completely because of it. It is because the cell phone represents independent thinking and empowerment or rebellion that Das in *Bangalore Days* throws his wife Divya's cell phone out of the car window, depriving her of the freedom to communicate with her friends. The cell phone is

a positive element in Jerry's professional success in *Jacobinte Swargarajyam*. It represents communication and negotiation; it represents relationships and love.

The public telephone in Kunjananthan's shop is a foil to the cell phone in the hands of his wife as well as the upper class people in the other films. The phone rings and Kunjananthan calls people by using a whistle that he has hung in the shop. The small local shops, the auto driver, the Ambassador car, the fence that separates Kunjananthan's house from the untarred street beside his house and the local foods are all, like the old telephone, representatives of a dying era. As we, the implied viewers, watch the film, we realize what the end is going to be, and that globalization and urbanization are inevitable. Kunjananthan himself is an anachronism and exasperates his wife continuously. Even as we accept and appreciate his goodness, we also get exasperated at his embracing tradition so much that the family has to suffer. As commercialization and urbanization trickles into the society, as people become busier with their cell phones, as values and relationships die out, Suku, the village musician who plays his musical instrument and sings alone in the night, a poor destitute who represents the village, commits suicide. This represents the death-like transformation of the idyllic village and the villagers.

Along with the cell phone, social media is also dealt as another important trope. New Generation films developed a novel way of communication between characters through facebook, email and Whatsapp chats. The cell phone and social media both function as reminders of the artificiality and hypocrisy of urban metropolitan societies, which divorces man from his natural lie. At some points of modern human history, for example, at the end of the 19th century, when the

Western society underwent massive upheavals, deliberate artificiality had emerged as a major feature of culture. At this time, the Decadents employed elaborate and highly artificial kinds of costume and lifestyle to express their ennui and numbness towards social turmoil. Such artificiality or loss of the true and original can be seen in the films of the 2000s in the form of contrived situations, untruthful protagonists and so on.

Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* experiences the ill effects of the social media when the video of his sexual intimacy with Sonia goes viral. Though Kunjananthan constantly criticizes his wife Chithra for being active on the social media, Chithra retaliates on one occasion that when he failed to listen to her or understand her over these years, it was the social media chat rooms that offered her solace. This dialogue subtly throws light on the isolation and loneliness the cyber individuals of the globalized society suffer in their lives, and how the social media addresses this problem. Kunjananthan, meanwhile, conducts his own “social media” activities in writing posters by hand and putting them up in the village square at night. These posters are meant to create awareness among the villagers regarding burning social problems like rise in prices and the ill-effects of development. In the 2011 multi-narrative thriller *Traffic* that is regarded as the starting point of the Malayalam New Wave cinema, the social media plays a vital role in completing the task of transferring a live human heart from one city to another for transplantation. In the film *Virus* (2019) also the social media plays a constructive role in arresting the spread of the Nipah virus in Kerala.

Cars are also both positive and negative in implication in these films. Dr. Arun’s life is almost destroyed by his passion for expensive cars. The Mercedes

Benz car of Jacob represents his love for his wife, and is less like a commodity and more like a living family member. In *Bangalore Days*, Arjun and Das are bikers and bike riding is their passion as well as nemesis. It was in a bike accident that Das's former lover Natasha gets killed, destroying his happiness and goodness of character until Divya heals him. In Kunjananthan's case, cars and expensive vehicles are a menace and representative of a flashy life, until the protagonist has to take his injured son to hospital. Thus, *Kunjananthante Kada* builds up a strong opposition against globalization and consumer capitalism, only to deliver the message that "Globalization is good" at the end of the film.

Food is also a motif that has symbolic significance in many of these movies. The metro-individuals like Arjun and Sonia in *Chaappa Kurishu*, and Arun and even Lakshmi in *Diamond Necklace* eat working lunch like burgers and chocolates, and eat at coffee shops, expensive restaurants or pubs. In *Chaappa Kurishu*, food plays a major role in establishing Ansari's character. Ansari cannot afford to eat anything more than unhealthy porotta and sugar, and is made fun of for eating this for breakfast everyday. The tea shop owner even offers to give him fifty rupees so that he can eat a biryani. His sweetheart and co-worker Nafeesa (Nivetha Thomas) brings him ghee rice from home but he does not even get to eat it because he is sent away by Martin on a chore just then. At the end of the film he takes the fifty rupees he had been offered contemptuously everyday, and goes off confidently to eat the biryani. He had taught the wealthy Arjun a good lesson and now is equal to him.

In *Kunjananthante Kada*, the selling of provisions by the protagonist is a life-saving service for the small village community. Kunjananthan having dinner

in the kitchen is repeatedly shown and it is over dinner that husband criticizes wife for her bad cooking and argues over the low-income shop. Kunjananthan's finicky fussy conservative nature is seen in this dinner ritual, which contrasts with the practical and ambitious nature of his wife.

Food is a major symbol in at least two blockbuster films of the New Wave – *Salt N' Pepper* (2011) and *Ustad Hotel* (2012). In these two films, food is not a mere commodity, but a culture, a tradition, a lifestyle, and serves to bridge gaps in old relationships and forge new relationships. In *Ustad Hotel*, food is an identity, a memory, a classical heritage that is to be preserved. In *Salt N' Pepper*, the highlight is street food in Kerala, which brings all genders and classes together and constitutes the collective identity of the Malayali community. Street food also offers a strong resistance to the globalized food habits created and promoted by multinational corporations in globalized societies. Donatella Privitera and Francesco Saverio Nesci assert in the article “Globalization vs. Local: The Role of Street Food in the Urban Food System”:

Street food represents a moment in this “new” experience and relationship with the local area. This phenomenon connects to the cultural, territorial, and ethnic, has always existed, and also has a positive impact on local economies and ecosystems, because it is mostly traditional and thus made with locally sourced foods (Marras, 2014). It is an alternative to globalization, an instrument of socialization, a means to do business, and to communicate also with young people. (717)

The malls are the topmost shopping spaces in our cities, frequented by the NRIs, upper class elites and metropolitan citizens. The department stores and supermarkets are visited by the middle-classes. One of the films under study, *Chaappa Kurishu*, is alternately set in a supermarket called Big Mart, in the shacks and the crowded roads of Ernakulam city, and in the posh home and office spaces lived in by the super wealthy people. The supermarket where Ansari works represents the middle classes, and is the realm of the supermarket supervisor Martin who is also an insurance dealer, and customers like the snobbish woman who drives an expensive car whom the lower class Ansari comes to hate. The shack where Ansari lives and shares toilets with others, the tea shop where he eats a routine diet of maida porotta and sugar for Rs 5 and the crowded roads he walks through, all represent the spaces traversed by the lowest sections of the society. These are all in stark contrast to the luxurious living spaces of Arun, Maya and Dr. Savithri.

The shopping malls and supermarkets clearly represent consumerism and commodification of a materialistic globalized culture, which is the exact opposite of what the kirana shop run by Kunjananthan stands for. Kunjananthan's shop stands alone on a small hillside overlooking a village square, in stiff opposition to the onslaught of development and modernity that is about to take over the remote village in the form of a four-lane highway and cityscapes including shopping malls and multispecialty hospitals. The narrative makes it clear that this shop is far removed from the materialistic, consumerist culture of the city. Kunjananthan's shop has a soul of its own – he talks to it and takes comfort from it. The shop is a manifestation of Kunjananthan's father, of past values and

traditions, and of relationships that are now fast disappearing – when Kunjananthan's wife Chithra fails to value the shop, he gets deeply hurt and insecure as if his very existence is being put to question. The shop is not merely a shop, but is a landmark in the village – for everyone's daily lives revolves around the shop. Kunjananthan is not just a businessman, his running this shop is social service that keeps everyone well-fed and happy – for Kunjananthan does not sell a large quantity of rice to one customer and saves some for any poor man who might approach him in urgent need; he also lends money to a poor man with the advice that he should maintain financial discipline.

Kunjananthante Kada also makes ample use of visual and aural effects. The sound design, editing and mixing of the film are done by the Oscar-winner Resul Pookutty who has made the film rich with natural sounds as against the artificial and jarring sounds of the city. Madhu Ambat's cinematography has created claustrophobic interiors, especially the interior of the shop where Kunjananthan takes refuge at night and talks to the shop, and the interior of his bedroom where he becomes more and more estranged from his wife who supports urbanization. The film unmistakably presents urbanization as negative and dark, until the very end when Kunjananthan is convinced of its positive effects. This dichotomy is there as the dichotomy between day and night also, and arguably the dichotomy between the protagonist and his wife.

There is another unmistakable dyad that runs through all these films – that of youth and old age. The young people in these films are much more independent and powerful than those of the Mohanlal-Mammootty era, and hence also immature and faltering. They make mistakes, but always turn towards a self-

realization and reformation, and are hence the true torchbearers of tomorrow. The youth as the caretakers of the future is clearly depicted in films like *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* and *Bangalore Days*. Jerry played by Nivin Pauly is a case in point. Arjun, the character played by Dulquer in *Bangalore Days* became an icon of youthful bohemian life for Kerala audience. It is significant that the film has a song “Namma ooruv Bangaluru” which is an exact copy of the famous Bryan Adams song “Summer of 69” (1984) which presents nostalgic images of a youthful culture. The focus on the young does not take the focus away from the family structure. Jerry’s mission is to protect the family structure.

In *Bangalore Days* also preservation of marital relationship and family security are the main concerns of the plot. The focus on the youth also implies a focus on the present moment. In *Diamond Necklace*, Arun and later Maya holds, “I have no regrets about the past; I’m not anxious about my future; I’m living in the present.” In *Jacobinte Swargarajyam*, even as traditions and the lessons of the past remain extremely important, what saves Jerry and his family is the rootedness in the present challenges, opportunities and solutions. The excessive importance to the present is an expression of the late capitalist consumerist society which disregards past traditions and indulges in the present in shopping malls and the internet. In *Kunjananthante Kada*, Kunjananthan learns to overcome his greatest folly, which is clinging to the past. Das in *Bangalore Days* also learns, in an oblique way, that what matters is not the past, but the present.

The family continues to be a central defining principle of the society in New Generation films as well. In all the films discussed here, the family is in one way or the other falling apart, but the central characters always return to the

family structure at the end. From the beginning, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* highlights the family as the happiest place for a person to belong to, with shared dinner times, family outings, sacrifices and caring for one another, teasing one another and all kinds of fun. However, this family structure does not remain unified for a long time because of Jacob's financial miscalculation. Later, after Jerry has taken superhuman effort to set the mistakes of his father right, the father Jacob cannot face his son. But family values triumph in the end and the mother gets the father and son reconnected. In *Chaappa Kurishu* and *Diamond Necklace*, the Fahadh Faasil characters are flirtatious and not sincere about their family relationships, but they learn to get back to family values. There is a scene when Arjun in *Chaappa Kurishu* hugs his fiancé Ann at the dressmaker's and winks at the transgender designer at the same time. This can be contrasted with another hug scene, at the end of *Diamond Necklace*, when Rajasree throws what she thinks to be an expensive diamond necklace into the ocean to show that her husband means more to her than material possessions, and Dr. Arun hugs her. Here he shuts his eyes tight and the world around them becomes insignificant in front of their love. This film is steeped in capitalist motifs from beginning to end, but at the end gives a strong anti-capitalist, anti-materialist message.

The motif of the family throws into focus the issue of morality in these films. Even the films that show an urban, metropolitan culture upholds conservative moral attitudes at the end. It perhaps has to be so, since the capitalist system depends on the success of the institution of the family (who are the biggest potential consumers), which in turn is deeply rooted in the concept of morality and heterosexuality. In *Diamond Necklace*, though Dr. Arun, Dr. Savitri

and Maya are global citizens with immense international experience, Dr. Savitri is upset at Arun sharing a house with Maya, and presumes that they will start a romantic or sexual affair soon.

Given that in the West it is common that people of all genders share houses, and that Maya is a girl who grew up in Paris, this conservative approach seems odd. Though Arun and Arjun are rather loose in their morals, it is an indication of their immaturity and the attraction of the metropolis, and they are brought back to the traditional family system in the end. The characters who are not enamoured of city life remain highly moral in these movies under study. In *Bangalore Days*, Das suspects Divya of having an undesirable intimacy with Arjun, but he is proved wrong. Das's past affair is accepted by Divya when she realizes how deeply affectionate their relationship had been. A New Generation film that exposes the hypocrisies associated with issues of morality is *Shutter* (2012) where a man and a woman are trapped inside a shop where they met to spend the night, and it becomes impossible for them to open the shutter of the shop and leave the shop for fear of being discovered.

Morality and relationships are of course a central issue in many New Generation films, as in the films of the earlier era. In *Salt N' Pepper*, for example, the central characters are a bachelor and a spinster who ultimately form a family. However, there is a wider range of themes in New Generation films while majority of superstar films of the 1980s and early 1990s were centred on romance or family. New Generation films of the post-1990s such as *Traffic*, *Indian Rupee*, *How Old Are You?* *Red Chillies*, *Ee Adutha Kalathu*, *Left Right Left*, *Njan Marykutty*, etc are not primarily on the theme of romance and family.

Even romance-based movies like *Ishq* (2019) deal with social issues other than romance and family relationships as the central driving principle of the film narrative. This move away from the clichéd formula of boy meets girl and falls in love, and finally gets her braving all sorts of problems, is a change that signals changes in the globalized society.

The films of the 2000s, starting from early films like *Chaappa Kurishu* down to later ones like the highest-ever grossing film in Malayalam cinema *Pulimurugan* (2016), rely heavily on technology and present variations of what is called the “Contemporary Sublime.” The “Contemporary Sublime,” a concept that originated in an article “The Sublime is Now” (1948) by Barnet Newman, refers to the excessive space-time compressions that result from the awe-inspiring complexity and scale of the capitalist-industrial system and in technology. I would take as an example the final fight scene between Arjun and Ansari in *Chaappa Kurishu*.

The fight takes place in a public toilet which is metaphoric of the dirt and squalor of modern societies. The fight is a detailed, extremely violent close-up sequence of the two men’s bodies battered and bruised, rolling on the toilet floor, hitting dirty urinals and getting soiled—again metaphoric of the inner turmoil and aggression as well as the vulnerability and helplessness of the urban, globalized citizen, both rich and poor. This fast-paced scene also creates a rather unrealistic and experimental depiction of space and time very different from conventions in mainstream films. Such a technology-generated space-time compression is presented in *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* as well, in depicting the Dubai scenario as well as in *Bangalore Days* in the bike-race scene.

Such postmodern compressions of space and time which are common in Hollywood films and in the Indian films of the later 2010s have been directly linked to globalization in the works of the geographer and social theorist David Harvey (b. 1935), the pre-eminent Marxist theorist of globalization. Harvey's book *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) connects globalization with the profound changes in our experiences of time and space. Harvey employed the expression "time-space compression" to denote how the fast-paced economic activities of the present age result in the destruction of spatial and temporal barriers. Harvey points out that in a globalized postmodern society, capital moves at a speed faster than ever before, especially with the help of advanced communication and transportation technologies. Extreme space-time compressions happen every day all the time in advanced computerized cities and in global financial institutions.

Most of the New Generation films also depict varying images of what is called the Post-Truth era. Post-Truth is a philosophical idea that shows that ideal and shared conceptions of Truth have disappeared from postmodern societies. Objective truth in the contemporary era is highly mediated and almost entirely constructed by the manipulation of technology and the media, and seen to dominate the realms of politics, business and the like. Post-Truth involves not just a falsifying of facts, but turning facts to be less important than emotion. In a 31 December 2016 article titled "The Year we reinvented the truth," Shiv Visvanathan analyzes the political events of that year in the light of the concept of "Post-Truth" and asserts:

A post-truth society combines facts and illusions in substitutive ways. It is a drama enacted by a population that no longer trusts the old definition of the political. It is the reinvention of trust, which makes society rewrite political facts. Facts are no longer empirical entities, but a kaleidoscopic mix of anxieties, misunderstandings and myths. In this collage of partly-empirical data, gossip is often mistaken for gospel.

Oxford Dictionaries adopted this term as the “Word of the Year” in 2016 and attest to the fact that the Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich first used the term in a 1992 essay in *The Nation*. Ralph Keyes’ *The Post-Truth Era* (2004) discussed the term as an expression for the state of the media-driven world that is increasingly rooted in deception and artifice. Many Malayalam films of the New Generation genre employ elements of Post-Truth, most notably, the 2019 film *Lucifer* by Prithviraj Sukumaran and Murali Gopy where a big political game player turns out to be an undercover smuggler.

The apolitical comedy movies of the 1980s had laid the foundation to the process of detaching films from political discourses. This had set the perfect fertile ground for the growth of individuals detached from the society and devoid of social commitment. It was at this point that the global economy got introduced to India through, what is popularly known as “Manmohanomics”. The new generation movies did not follow the star trend of the movies of the 1990s, but there was still much fanfare. This shows that the star image is more than a mere type. Richard Dyer, in his *Stars* comments, “Stars embody social types, but star images are always more complex and specific than types. Types are, as it were,

the ground on which a particular star's image is constructed. This image is found across a range of media texts" (60).

The new generation movies, though, brought an active end to the feudal hypermasculinity, fed upon the consumer culture. The new generation movies reversed the lens from the hypermasculine image to that of the ordinary man's everyday experience, it spiced up these everyday lives with newer desires of consumerism. The space of the city and the urban hinges were exploited for this purpose.

The new generation movies, usually, began with an aerial or top-angle shot of a concrete jungle, or a pan shot of the busy and hectic urban life. These films mapped the geographies of the city and took the audience into a surrogate journey of desires and possibilities. The etching of the city space in these films is like getting engaged in window shopping. The audience enjoys the pleasures of a flaneur. These films, in one way, introduce the audience to different commercial products and the infinite possibilities of owning those. Both interior and exterior spaces advance the consumer possibility.

All the films taken for discussion in this chapter, do justice to the consumer market culture and the sign value of products. The space of city, with its innumerable chances of possession and the joy therein, generates a consumerist voyeurism. The architectural planning of cities makes the unequal economic distribution, startlingly visible. This is well dealt in an interview in Asianet News by the actor Vinayakan. In the programme titled *Point Blank*, Vinayakan talks about his subaltern position and how the architecture of cities

deliberately create dark spaces of subalternity. He takes the instances of Overbridges that are built upon, the once, farm lands, where people from the lower strata, who used to work in fields, used to stay.

A Neo-feudal assertion and material upliftment, though unequal, finds representation in these movies, where markers of caste overlap the seemingly modern life. The traditional mother and the house of the protagonist in *Diamond Necklace* and the representation of vestigial spaces through the character of Sreenivasan stresses upon the distance between the two people and their lives. The character of Sreenivasan, with his black body, remains the consistent subaltern engaged by the Malayalam film industry of the yesteryears. *Bangalore Days*, misses altogether this subaltern space. The feudal grandeur celebrated by the films of the 1990s form the skeletal background to the movie.

Jacobinte Swargarajyam narrates the struggle of the rich NRI who has to maintain the standard of living, ascertaining the high class savarna status. *Chappakurish* deals with the subaltern spaces as the distortion to the normal flow of happy events in the life of the upper class in the city. It is the filth of the city that causes the conflict and deranges lives. The final stunt scene has already been dealt in detail above. *Kunjananthante Kada* remains an unhappy marriage of the 1980s goodwill character of Mammotty to the evil consumer society, where the story finally leads to a consumerist solution. All these films stress on the consumer culture and its gaudy glory by ousting the Other to the feudal structure, thereby, asserting the feudal, upper caste identities.

Gadgets become important props in the New Generation movies that represent the ethos of the times, on one side, and on the other works towards selling commodities of globalization as part of the diegetic structure. Gadgets are important symbols in all the movies taken for study in this chapter, in the form of a diamond necklace, credit cards, high end mobile phones, speed bikes, romantic gifts, cars, palatial houses, and even, cosmopolitan grocery.

The elite NRI community has found massive representation in these movies, either a primary character or as the others against which the subaltern struggles to make the ends of their desire meet. Making fun of a low-end car and the necessity of owning a high end one, even in the face of financial breakdown throughs light on the sign value of commodities in the Consumerist market. Almost all the new generation movies showcase shopping of branded products, either as an active engagement of the primary characters or as a denial to the protagonist who is unable to purchase it. The female body and sexuality also come in as a commodity, in the global scenario, in these movies. Explicit treatment of sexuality is liberating with the evolution of strong female characters, onscreen, to which the new generation movies have contributed greatly. The next chapter will deal with these subaltern existences in both the 1990s movies and the new generation movies and examine the evolution of the contemporary position of women in cinema, connecting the off screen activities in the cinema industry with that of the on-screen changes.

This chapter has analyzed the New Generation films in Malayalam in the 2000s and after, and analyzed them for capitalist motifs and elements of globalization, as well as the variant commodity fetish, when compared to the

earlier generation of films. The films under focus here have made a significant departure from the earlier films of the 1980s and 90s. The societies depicted in these films are coming to grips with massive social changes that were brought into being in the wake of globalization. These films present a more cosmopolitan, transnational world where family values and traditional culture are fast disappearing, where technology has taken over, and people seek easy access to wealth and success.

The global values discussed in these films also point to the fact that these films cater to a global audience, who access these films through satellite TV and global marketing techniques. The commodity fetish could be seen on a rise, than the earlier decade, with the infusion of global products in the everyday lives. The star, even if devoid of the superstar status and the elaborate drama of the 1990s, still held the old wine, in newer bottles. All the three forms of the star, according to Richard Dyer's concept – that of construction, commodity and ideology, could be seen in the new generation movies. The space of the city gives greater freedom for a celebration of commodity fetish that seems more democratic than the one in the movie of the 1990s. However, these films show the same feudal, masculine, mainstream ideals and bring us back to a reinstatement of traditional values at the end, offering hope that the drastic changes in the social fabric are only temporary, and that our cultural ethos has not undergone tremendous changes. The voids and absences of the commercial cinema in Malayalam are found to be running across the movies of the 1990s and 2000s. The subaltern spaces of the commercial Malayalam movies assert the capitalist ideology of erased labour struggles.

Chapter Four

Gender-Caste Ramifications

The blood-stained beginning pages of the history of Malayalam cinema are witness to the casteist-patriarchal society. The first film in Malayalam *Vigathakumaran* that came out in 1928 was boycotted by the Casteist Hindu society because a Dalit woman played the part of a Nair woman in the film. The actor P.K. Rosy had to flee from her village. Even after more than eight decades, Malayalam cinema is seen to be haunted by the casteist-patriarchal conventions. The celebration of the feudal, patriarchal and bourgeoisie ideals in Malayalam cinema, has been studied the second and third chapters of this dissertation. This chapter, analyses the capitalist consumerist ideology with respect to the subaltern identities in Malayalam cinema from 1990s till 2015, using the same primary sources employed in the second and third chapters. The theories of Richard Dyer, C.S. Venkiteswaran and Marx's commodity fetish will be employed for the analysis.

The influence of Malayalam cinema in shaping the identity and ethos of the Kerala society cannot be understated. And this case is true for all of Indian cinemas as well. In a country like India which is the largest producer of films in the world, it is no surprise that cinema becomes for the citizens a Lacanian Mirror in which we find ourselves and through which we shape ourselves. The films under scrutiny here have variously shaped the Malayali sensibility regarding

gender, caste and class. Meena T. Pillai asserts in the article “The Daughters of Rosy”:

Malayalam cinema has played a leading role in imagining the Malayali as no other art form could possibly have. It offered a new language for the Malayali to represent himself/herself in, one which seemed more secular and democratic than the languages of all previous discourses in the cultural sphere.

It is indeed important to examine how the cinematic discourses of gender, caste and class have impacted on our society.

Gender and caste are two important parameters that define Indian cinema. These two elements cannot be separated and are inextricably bound in Malayalam cinema from its inception to the present time. Meena T. Pillai has made a powerful analysis of Malayalam cinema along these lines. At the beginnings of the industry in Kerala, Malayalam films upheld progressive ideals and humanitarian-socialist values. However, the progressive films of the 1950s such as *Jeevithanauka* (1951), *Navalokam* (1951), *Neelakuyil* (1954), *Snehaseema* (1954) and *Padathapainkili* (1957) all revolved around a conventional marriage and defined the male and female roles in the society. Pillai points out that the sexist and patriarchal ideology that underlay the progressive ideals is evident in the tragic fate of the first Malayalam actress P.K. Rosy who was hounded on account of both caste and gender for the “crimes” of being a Dalit woman who acted the role of an upper caste woman and also for being a woman who dared to enter the public sphere of cinema. Pillai points out that noteworthy is *Neelakuyil*,

a film by P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Karyat, which made a bold statement against casteism. Nevertheless, she also asserts: “However, the grave injustice meted out to Neeli, the Dalit woman in the story, is only brought in to emphasise caste as the underlying determinant factor of an exploitative society.”

In the 1960s, strong women characters emerged in Malayalam films. Meena T. Pillai credits the social reform movements for this positive change, for these movements had indeed been successful to a large extent in “mobilising women to enter the public sphere.” She points out:

In movies such as *Bharya* (1962), *Aadyakiranangal* (1964), *Sthanarthi Saramma* (1966), *Iruttinte Aathamavu* (1967), *Aswamedham* (1967), *Thulabharam* (1968), and *Adhyapika* (1968), the heroines of yore such as Sarada, Sheela, Ambika, Padmini and Ragini played strong women who were also citizens inhabiting a public space. However, they were bound by the conventions and codes of traditional femininity. Moreover, it is their tears and sacrifices, trials and martyrdom that earn them respectability and legitimise their presence in the public sphere.

The seventies saw the rise of great artists like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, T.V. Chandran, K.G. George, Padmarajan and numerous other directors who developed a new aesthetics of Malayalam cinema. Meena T. Pillai shows how in films like Adoor’s *Swayamvaram* “the ambivalent fate of Malayali women” was depicted, caught the pre-modern traditional matrilineal past and the ambiguities and paradoxes of modernity. Many films of this time presented

nuanced readings of the constructions of both masculinity and femininity in the Kerala society of the time. However, “the much-celebrated film society movement was hardly able to address the female spectator and women remained largely on the fringes of the film viewing experience.”

The depiction of women in the 1980s and 90s was increasingly capitalistic, patriarchal and neo-conservative. This was a backlash against the liberal humanist, idealistic values of an earlier era. I would argue that this was the effect of the deeply Socialist-Communist Kerala society of the 1970s being transformed by foreign money (mostly from the Non-Resident Keralites in the Gulf countries) and the growth of capitalism. Meena T. Pillai shows that in this period there was the attempt to create “a pan-Malayali identity” that centred on the increasingly “machoistic and tradition-bound modern hero” in films like *Devasuram*, *Commissioner*, *Spadikam*, *The King*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Narasimham*, *Ravanaprabhu*, etc., complemented by an increasingly “feminised and conforming heroine.”

This was also then time in Kerala society when more educated women started stepping out into the public domain as technocrats, bureaucrats and career women, and “cinema started echoing a male paranoia of being dominated by the woman.” This means that women’s increasing aware of their rights and independence in real society, led to increased misogyny and subjugation of women on the film screen.

The “New Generation” movies reflect the anxieties of a generation who are the offspring of Liberalisation, of the satellite television boom and

globalisation. Many of these films have been criticized for being superficial and commercial. However, there is an unmistakable opening up of caste and gender boundaries in the movies post-2010. In recent films in Malayalam, empowerment of women has undeniably begun to be an accepted theme. Cases in point are Aashiq Abu's *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) and *Rani Padmini* (2015), Rosshan Andrews' *How Old Are You* (2014), Manu Ashokan's *Uyare* (2019), and so on. Also, many recent films have stepped boldly outside the confines of the dominant ideology of heterosexuality and provided glimpses into homosexuality and transexuality. Prominent examples are Shyamaprasad's *Ritu* (2009), *English: An Autumn in London* (2013), Sajin Babu's *Asthamayam Vare* (2014), Jeethu Joseph's *Life of Josutty* (2015), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and so on. Films of this time also started to attack the monolithic notions of masculinity and the middle-class male's complacency. Sanal Kumar Sasidharan's *Ozhivu Divasathe Kali* (2015) and *S Durga* (2018), Sathyan Anthikad's *Njan Prakashan* (2018), Jubith Namradath's *Aabhaasam* (2018), Anuraj Manohar's *Ishq* (2019), and Lijo Jose Pellissery's *Jallikattu* (2019) are pertinent examples.

The weakening of the institution of masculinity and heterosexuality has also resulted in the defusing of the central concept of the heterosexual family in the films of this time, while the movies of the Mammooty-Mohanlal era were predominantly revolving around the love-marriage-family themes. The decentring of the family has also led to the interrogation of the concepts of morality, chastity, fidelity, sin, and so on. The defusing of the essentially upper-caste notions has also opened up the dialogues and debates on Dalit identities, the

stark and subhuman realities of suburban, rural communities as well as the so-called criminal lower classes of the cities. Indeed, Marxist feminism holds that gender oppression is closely related to class oppression and the relationship between men and women is similar to the relationship between the social classes, and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Women's subordination thus becomes an extension of class and caste oppression, as seen in films like *Vidheyan* (1993), directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan. The subordination and sexual exploitation of women serves the interests of the ruling classes and the capitalists and is even actively maintained through institutions like mainstream commercial movies. Kamal's *Celluloid* (2013), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and Rajeev Ravi's *Kammatti Paadam* (2016) are films that have boldly depicted caste dynamics and given voice to the Dalit. This reflects in the Kerala State Film Award for the Best Award being given to Salim Kumar (2010), Vinayakan (2016), Indrans (2017), Soubin Shahir (2018), as well as the National Award for Best Actor for Salim Kumar (2011) and Suraj Venjaramoodu (2014). None of these actors don the *savarna* body of the desirable male, as represented in the earlier Malayalam movies. The black body of Sathyan was given sanction because of the political nature of the films in which he acted and the revolutionary concepts of renaissance that he stood for. These awards changed the nature of Malayalam cinema and opened up the big screen to liberal treatment of caste politics. These films about the marginal people who were hitherto silenced in mainstream Malayalam cinema, in effect satirize the manners, social customs, and financial dealings of Kerala's new prosperous professional class that has emerged in the

post-globalization era. This chapter discusses these elements of gender and caste in the films of the post-globalization era.

Gender and women's issues have been major concerns in Malayalam cinema from its very beginnings. P. Bhaskaran's 1969 film *Kallichellamma* was a woman-oriented movie for which Sheela got the Best Actress Award in the State in that year. The film shows the trials of a poor orphan girl being loved by two men, and ultimately committing suicide out of the pressures of being a woman trying to survive in a society which has double standards to men and women in terms of sexuality and morality. K.S. Sethumadhavan's 1974 film *Chattakkari* and J. Sasikumar's 1975 film *Chattambikkalyaani* are later woman-centric narratives. It is with the rise of stardom in Malayalam cinema in the 1980s that women characters turned weak and became relegated to domestic and sexual roles. In the superstar movies of Mohanlal and Mammooty, and later Dileep, the heroine shrank to being a powerless and insignificant stage prop, a pawn in the game of power and revenge, the object of sexual gratification. The sexual objectification of the female in this time is to be seen in relation to the rise of the erotic actress Silk Smitha. The women characters in the mainstream movies of the 1980s and 90s served stereotypical roles as silent suffering victims of the patriarch, or over smart shrews who are taught lessons by the heroic man, or as the perfect epitome of femininity that is a submissive counterpart to the male hero. Mohanlal films starting from *Devasuram* (1993) down to the recent *Lucifer* (2019) are illustrative of the overarching hero subjugating the heroine. In the family movies of Mammooty from the beginnings down to the present, such as *Vatsalyam* (1993) or *Hitler* (1996) or *Valyettan* (2000), and in his action/police

movies like *Avanaazhi* (1986), *Oru CBI Diary Kurippu* (1988), *Inspector Balram* (1991), down to *Kasaba* (2016), the plot centred on excessive displays of toxic masculinity and unabashed oppression of women characters. However, the 2019 film *Unda* is a complete aberration and presents the helplessness and failure of the hero's masculinity.

Continuing the trend of toxic masculinity in the superstar films of Mohanlal and Mammooty, we can see the same trend of misogyny in the films of Suresh Gopi starting from *Commissioner* (1994), Jayaram starting from *Minnaminunginum Minnukettu* (1995), the later films of Dileep such as *Mister Butler* (2000), *Kochi Rajavu* (2005), *Mulla* (2008), *Body Guard* (2010), *Karyasthan* (2010), *Christian Brothers* (2011), and *Ramaleela* (2017). In films like *Chanthupottu* (2005) and *Mayamohini* (2012), Dileep has also played characters that are a mockery of transwomen and homosexuals. Prithviraj Sukumaran has also displayed excessive masculinity and mockery of women and transpeople in films like *Chocolate* (2007), *Puthiya Mukham* (2009), *Thanthonni* (2010), *Pokkiriraja* (2010), and so on. An article in *Women's Web* titled "Misogyny and Malayalam Cinema: Why the Women in Cinema Collective is Striking Fear" discusses the extremely misogynistic nature of Malayalam cinema and how the Women in Cinema Collective came into being:

Malayalam cinema since the 1990s and the beginning of the superstar reign, has seen major paradigm shifts, with regards to the position of women. Films tend to have male actors with larger than life characters and women sidelined, ridiculed with abusive dialogues are aplenty. With greater visibility for these films,

through television channels, the dialogues repeated again and again, patriarchy has asserted itself firmly in Malayalam cinema industry.

The emergence of the subaltern bodies and identities, in the movies of the times, reflect the important developments in the socio-political sphere that signalled such a welcome change towards the demise of heterosexuality, male heroism and upper caste domination in Malayalam cinema are the scrapping of Article 377 at the national level and the formation of Women in Cinema Collective in Kerala. The glorification of misogyny and turning it into a plot device was dealt a heavy blow when actor Dileep was arrested in July 2017 for conspiring against an actress and abducting her. This incident brought out the patriarchal underside of the Malayalam film industry, and led to the powerful voices of female actors like Manju Warriar, Parvathy and Rima Kallingal being raised against the male domination in the industry. The private lives of the stars and their relationships were increasingly called into question in the resulting controversy and the majority of film personnel in the Malayalam film industry associated with AMMA, FEFKA and the Directors' and Production Executives' Unions turned out to support Dileep. This led to the formation of the Women in Cinema Collective in Kerala in the same year. Tara Nair asserts the importance of the formation of WCC, highlighting the intergenerational change in attitudes to gender and professions:

The formation of the WCC may go down in Indian film industry as a landmark event for its pioneering role in posing an eloquent challenge to the status quo dominated by a patriarchal worldview,

produced and reproduced through material and ideological means. The collective also represents, again in revolutionary ways, the articulation of the feminist consciousness in the creative industry... This seems inevitable when more young, educated, talented, and articulate women join various departments of filmmaking with visions of pursuing professional creative careers.

(16)

Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code which existed from the times of British rule (introduced in 1861) and penalized homosexuality was amended in September 2018, decriminalizing homosexuality. The Article 377 reads thus:

Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

In 2011, Italian film maker Adele Tulli, made *365 Without 377* which followed the landmark ruling in 2009, and the Indian LGBTQ community in Bombay celebrations. It won the Turin LGBT Film Fest award in the same year. This has led to a great change in Malayalam films which now depicts LGBTIQ people with greater empathy now in films like *Njan Marykutty* (2018).

Before the advent of the so-called New Generation movement in Malayalam cinema, transsexual people as well as lesbian and gay love had been depicted as dangerous tendencies that sought to weaken and even overthrow the

heterosexual family ethos. Except for some occasional glimpses, alternate sexualities were never the central concern of mainstream Malayalam movies of the twentieth century. The New Generation films of the post-2000 era show a great tolerance and understanding for the issues related to sexual minorities, women and the people of under privileged castes. Some attempts to depict homoerotic impulses and relationships were made in the post-2010 period. Significant examples are *Mumbai Police* (2013) made by Rosshan Andrrews-Bobby Sanjay-Prithviraj team, *My Life Partner* (2014) made by M.B. Padmakumar-Ameer Niyas-Sudev Nair team, and *Ka Bodyscapes* (2016) made by Jayan Cherian-Jaison Chacko-Rajesh Kannan team.

All of these films are certainly not truthful objective depictions of LGBTIQ reality. These films offer outsider views of the community as well as insider-views. Dr. Resmi G. and Anilkumar K.S., in the book *Vellithirayude Rashtreeyam* (2018), have analyzed these films and pointed out that the curiosity, amusement and even contempt that the heterosexual mainstream feels for the alternate sexualities is what gets highlighted in *Mumbai Police* and *My Life Partner*. *Mumbai Police* centres on the apparently very masculine protagonist Anthony Moses's hidden gay identity. After an accident that affects his memory, he is repulsed by his own gay sexuality that gave him immense pleasure in his life before the accident. *My Life Partner* establishes that homosexual people can attempt to integrate themselves into the mainstream. This film validates the skewed perceptions of the heterosexual mainstream that homosexuality can be "cured" through psychological treatment, gay conversion therapy, counseling, religious prayers and rituals, and so on. Both these films, *Mumbai Police* and *My*

Life Partner, project heterosexual identity as “normal” and acceptable, while relegating the gay identity as an aberration.

However, these films attempted to open up debates on this issue, and the Kerala society has become increasingly ready to understand and accept the LGBTIQ community and their role in the society, as evidenced by the Pinarayi-led LDF government’s active support of the community as well as the greater visibility and better participation of the members of these communities in academic, social and public sphere arenas. *Ka Bodyscapes* however depicts gay politics in a very truthful and objective light. The LGBTIQ activists of Kerala like Jijo Kuriakose were directly involved in the making of the film. When Harris and Vishnu fall in love, the artist Harris also boldly represents their love on his canvas. The film exposes the pretensions of the Kerala society and the hostility they nurture towards homosexuality and gay art. This film is a milestone in the history of alternate sexualities in Kerala.

Ka Bodyscapes also brings to light many other pertinent issues related to gender, religion and caste. It discusses issues like an RSS man’s love for his Muslim friend, women’s menstruation and masturbation, body freedom and body politics, etc which constitute a powerful indictment of patriarchal values. The film also exposes the conservative and violent attitudes of the Hindus as well as the Muslims against homosexuality. The Muslim Harris paints a picture of Hanuman and fights for the freedom of the body, in the process eliminating his own freedom and life. This film also shows us that religion and caste politics is deeply intertwined with gender and sexuality issues in Kerala, and by extension, India. The highlight of menstruation in the film as a traditional means of

subjugating the woman and pushing her to the margins of the society is also noteworthy. This film, which is a deep experiment in satire and gender criticism, thus subverts established ideas regarding the body, sexuality and identity, and inaugurates a new age of body politics in Malayalam cinema.

Lesbian love has found its way into Malayalam cinema long before *Ka Bodyscapes*. This is probably because male homosexuality which subverts established notions of masculinity is much more deeply unsettling to patriarchy than the love of women for other women. Lesbian love has been depicted in as early as 1978 in the film *Randu Penkuttikal* directed by Mohan, Padmarajan's *Desatanakili Karayarilla* (1986), Liji Pullappilly's *Sancharam* (2004), Said Usman's *Silent Valley* (2012), Muhammed Razi's *Velutha Ratri* (2017), and so on. These films stand testimony to the fact that it is extremely difficult and even impossible for lesbians in Kerala even in 2019 to reveal their identity and get accepted within the society. In Kerala society, many lesbian couples who have made their identities publically known have suffered from attacks by the media syndicate and in social media, leading eventually to break up of their relationships and psychological trauma. The case of Nandu and Sheela, which ended in a fiasco and Nandu's second relationship with Sowmya also ending in a breakup are cases in point (Vanita 4). Though the Nimmy-Sally couple in Padmarajan's film does not establish their identity and social space, Kiran and Delila in *Sancharam* successfully create an alternate space for themselves. However, in films like *Silent Valley* or *Velutha Ratri*, there is no effective questioning of the sexual and moral codes of the mainstream patriarchal society,

which reveals the disability of Malayalam cinema and the Kerala society to break free from conservative mindsets in terms of gender and sexuality.

The depiction of transsexual people had always been a source of hilarious comedy and ridicule in Malayalam cinema, and Indian cinema at large. Transpeople are also seen as the Other of the “normal” heterosexual society and turned into anti-heroes and villains. The depiction of transpeople in mainstream cinema is often a manifestation of “homophobia” and “transphobia” which is the fear of the LGBTIQ people in terms of sexual purity, physical purity and cleanliness, morality, and so on. These homophobic attitudes are deeply entrenched in the social psyche of India / Kerala, which leads to the stereotyping and alienation of this community by branding them as beggars, robbers, perverts and sex workers. It is undeniable that Malayalam films have played a major role in fanning homophobic and transphobic attitudes. Malayalam films up to the 2000s or 2010s have also engendered in the audience’s minds the notion that transwomen or Hijras are a North Indian phenomenon. The book *Vellithirayila Rashtreeyam* analyzes three films in Malayalam as imperfect and incomplete depictions of the transpeople in Kerala. These films are *Soothradharan* (2001) by Lohithadas, *Chanthupottu* (2005) by Lal Jose and *Odum Raja Aadum Rani* (2014) by Biju Varma.

Though most films depicting transpeople are insensitive to the real issues faced by this community, an important departure from this norm is found in *Ardhanaari* (2012) directed by Santosh Souparnika, with Manoj K. Jayan and Thilakan in the cast. This film is a faithful presentation of the beliefs, customs, practices, rituals and the transculture of the transcommunity that stand apart from

the male-centric mainstream cultures. Manoj K. Jayan has displayed an exceptionally great performance as the protagonist Manjula / Vinayan. However, the film failed to bring about a natural meeting of mainstream cultures and transcultures, and to create a space for the transpeople in the minds of the mainstream audiences. Talking about exceptional transgender movies naturally leads to a mention of the Bengali actor-director Rituparno Ghosh (1963-2013), who depicted in his film *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012) the gay love of two men, Rudra and Partho, of whom Rudra longs for the identity of a woman, evoking the *Mahabharata* transcharacter Chitrangada. Rituparno Ghosh's rendering of the character Rudra is a milestone in the history of transgender films in India, and this Bengali film is one of the best films in the genre. The 2018 film *Njan Marykutty* directed by Renjith Shankar, with Jayasurya in the main role is far from being great art, but is a commendable attempt in depicting transwomen's lives.

The depiction of transpeople in Malayalam cinema served largely to present a recurrent motif of emasculation that attempted to underscore the heroism and masculinity of the male protagonists. Films like Anil's *Parthan Kanda Paralokam* (2008), starring Jayaram, Shaji Kailas's *Drona* (2010) starring Mammooty and Abrid Shine's *Action Hero Biju* (2016) all present transcharacters to valorize the potency of sexually potent, attractive masculine body of the male protagonist. This tendency of presenting transpeople as antiheroes to accentuate the masculine potency and prowess of the hero is seen in Tamil cinema also, such as the science-thrillers Shankar's *I* (2015) and Anand Shankar's *Iru Mugan* (2016).

Masculinity is carefully maintained in mainstream movies of the superstar period in Malayalam by means of depicting the hero vis-à-vis old and emasculated men (for which purpose actors like Innocent and Oduvil Unnikrishnan served), lower caste, dark-skinned and often effeminate men (such as Kalabhavan Mani's role as Cheriya Namboothiri in *Aaraam Thampuran*), disabled men as well as women who need the protection of the hero (such as the character Sankaran played by Sudheesh and Devi played by Shobhana, both in *Valyettan*, Unnimaya in *Aaraam Thampuran*), and so on. It is also to be noted here that the hero attacks the villain by attacking his lack of masculinity or by threatening to emasculate him, as in many instances of Madhavanunni attacking Sivaraman in *Valyettan*. The fulfillment of the hero's masculinity is when he defeats the fully sexed man, that too without utilizing the hero's full power, and magnanimously lets him live, though the hero could have easily ended his life. This heightening of the hero's masculine triumph can be seen in *Devasuram* when half-invalid Neelan defeats and cuts off Sekharan's arm (instead of beheading him), and Madhavanunni, at the insistence of the women, lets Sivaraman live though he could have easily taken his life with a crowbar.

Masculinity that is thus carefully maintained and nurtured in the narrative attempts to address the women-spectators' unconscious and unfulfillable desire for a perfect male that they covet to possess as well as the desire (again unconscious and unfulfillable) of the young male spectators for a perfect Other that they crave to become. This perfect male is defined in terms of bodily physique, moral standards, stoic strength of character and chivalric values like generosity and fearlessness. Caroline and Filippo Osello have studied the various

conceptions of masculinity in Kerala society. Regarding Mammooty's representation of masculinity, Caroline and Filippo Osello posit:

Mammooty's family tragedies provoke welcome tears and endear him to those older women who are looking in a hero for a competent mature man: a good father, a fascinating husband, a masterful figure in the family. Mohan Lal, meanwhile, is the more popular of the two among the younger, unmarried women: one young man argued that Mohan Lal must be more attractive to girls and women because he plays a 'maximum lover, like Marlon Brando', going beyond women's expectations based on their real life menfolk. From a hypothetical female perspective, if Mohan Lal then deals in pre-marriage romantic fantasies, Mammooty appears to trade in the grittier realities of negotiating family life after marriage and parenthood. (177)

In post-2000s, globalization has brought giant leaps in health and fitness industry and the ideal Indian / Malayali body spectacle has been raised to the standards of Hollywood. The muscular well-maintained bodies of Salman Khan, Vikram or Prathviraj then became spectacles in themselves on the big screen. This bodily spectacle in post-globalization films should be studied in the light of psychoanalytic theories of desire and gaze. The ideal male body itself (especially in the action-adventure films) has now become released from its traditional romantic and family roles and got attached to erotic values that are not only heterosexual but also homoerotic and narcissistic. In other words, the ideal male

body now not only serves the purpose of attracting women, but also becomes an object of desire for men and for oneself.

The concept of “male gaze” introduced by Laura Mulvey in 1975 has now taken a new turn. Actors like Hrithik Roshan, Tiger Shroff, John Abraham, Prabhaas and Vikram are significant exemplars of this. Christopher Paul Wagenheim, in his PhD dissertation “Male Bodies On-Screen: Spectacle, Affect, and the Most Popular Action Adventure Films in the 1980s” has studied the hypermasculinity of actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, whose bodies constituted a filmic spectacle (as experienced by viewers) which is made up of two discrete dimensions, a physical dimension composed of technologically-driven massive scale action, violence and explosions and a physiological one composed of affect and emotion. These elements have infiltrated into the action-movies of the post-globalization India and Kerala.

In this context, the physique and age of Mohanlal and Mammooty, stood strong against criticisms that were raised off and on, because of the strong feudal undercurrents that had helped these actors carve out a niche for themselves. The hypermasculinity represented by these actors could be attributed mainly to the allegiance of the genral film viewing public to the decdent feudal structure, which places the upper caste above every other qualification. That in spite of the cessation of such feudal films, the image of these actors remain untarnished, at least to a percentage of audience, ascertains the feudal undercurrents in the society that was supplemented by a consumer culture where money and social status were valued above the individual.

Among the attacks on masculinity and hypermasculinity that have gained momentum in the post-2010 period, a name that deserves special mention is that of Santhosh Pandit. Santhosh Pandit created history in Malayalam cinema by creating a slapstick farce called *Krishnanum Radhayum* (2011) in which he played the lead role and also handled the lyrics, music, fights, art, editing, background music, effects, even as singer, story, dialogues, script, costumes, production designing and title graphics. This film which is a powerful mockery of elitist cinema and superstardom was marketed in the social media and won 5 crores in the box office. Jose K. Manuel discusses this incident in his Malayalam book *New Generation Cinema*:

The filmgoers in Kerala see Sathosh Pandit's *Krishnanum Radhayum* as a comic rendering of protest. People watch this movie in the theatres in order to howl it down, like they go in groups to Kodungalloor Bharani to sing profane songs. There are waves of uncontrollable protest in this howling. The protest against the destruction of Malayalam cinema. It also involves the demand for a better cinema. The manner in which this movie was marketed through YouTube was noteworthy. This movie establishes that the financial and cultural situation in Kerala is not antithetical to cinema and is accessible to anyone with a revolutionary mind. (my trans.; 18)

The problem with the comic treatment or farcical address of the films of Santhosh Pandit was that his films were produced out-of-context, the context being the grand narrative of feudalism of the 1990s movies. Pandit was late to enter the

screen and lacked the typical *savarna* features of Mohanlal and Mammooty, as well as the strong legacy of acting that they had showcased. The feudal hypermasculine self of the hero was carved out in the 1st phase of the twentieth century. Moreover, the lower status of YouTube as a marketing avenue, at the point when Pandit launched, brought those films down on the scale of social hierarchy.

The New Generation films in Malayalam resulted in a complete rebuilding of cinematic narration, and its perceptions of masculinity and genders. The liberal deconstructive view of genders started in Malayalam cinema in this period in films like *22 Female Kottayam* (2012), directed by Aashiq Abu. The hero and heroine in this rape and revenge film do not conform to conservative gender roles. The female protagonist is a nurse Tessa K. Abraham (played by Rima Kallingal) tells her lover openly:

Njan virgin alla. Ombatham classil padikkumbol Bennyumayi nadathiya oru mathil chattathil ath adichu poyi. [I'm not a virgin. Lost it in an escapade with Benny when in 9th Grade] (my trans.)

The male protagonist Cyril C. Mathew (played by Fahadh Faasil) is a pimp. Tessa falls into the trap of the womanizer Cyril who is running a travel consultant agency that Tessa visits to inquire about her visa for Canada. Cyril is an unscrupulous man who sells women to his clients for money. Tessa is repeatedly raped. She is then falsely accused of being a drug peddler and imprisoned, where she meets people who assist her in taking revenge on her abusers. She castrates Cyril and leaves for Canada, a contented person. The film demonstrates the

extent to which a woman can retaliate rather than surrender to the atrocities meted out to them.

Another film of this time subverting gender equations is *Salt N'Pepper* (2011). This film narrates the love relationship between an unconventional hero and heroine, Kalidasan and Maya (starring Lal and Sweta Menon) who are both middle-aged and mature, outside the confines of glamorized star image. Though their common interest in food and recipes brings them together, their reservations regarding their physical selves, appearances and age create a distance between them. This film breaks out of stereotypes regarding youth and romance, masculinity and femininity. Swapna Gopinath and Sony J. Raj in the article "Gender construct as a Narrative and Text: The Female Protagonist in New-Generation Malayalam Cinema," argue that even when these films show new revolutionary tendencies of depicting female characters and gender relations, the revolution is limited:

Changes are visible in the characterization of female roles, whose presence is obvious and given prominence in the film's marketing, yet with only a few superficial variations: they are clothed in modern attire and seem comfortable Indian women. They celebrate their financial freedom, as evidenced by their freedom to travel by night and to consume alcohol.... the freedom they enjoy as a result of changing social processes following globalization, which finds expression in their language, attire and gestures. The professions open to them are stereotypes: nurse, software engineer, fashion designer, or any career that makes them part of a

global and urban scape. Sexually explicit language and the use of expletives by women characters probably shock the average male viewer. Despite these new features, when faced with traditions of patriarchy and hegemonic patterns, New Generation cinema seems to falter, apparently seeking to adopt a new form and retain the content of the older cinema. The ideological framework, especially in the treatment of subaltern and womanhood, seems to be the old one of exploitation and silencing of the marginalized. Learning to drive is a forceful symbol in *Salt N' Pepper*; the character of Maya makes several attempts at gaining this liberty to move around as she pleases and exercise free will. But the transformation goes no further, since any radical movement beyond this will hinder the growth of new social structures based on altered power relations. (6-7)

Chaappa Kurishu (2011) and *Diamond Necklace* (2012) are two films that fall within the purview of this study that stretch depictions of gender to a new level, but fail to create a revolutionary impact. Both these films powerfully attack ideal notions of masculinity and employ the motif of emasculation or masculinity in crisis. In *Chaappa Kurishu*, the confidence of Arjun in his masculinity is underscored at the beginning of the movie when he flirts with another man's girl at the pub, winks at the transgender dressmaker while hugging his fiancée Ann, and videotapes his sexual act with Sonia. The phone becomes a phallic symbol when Arjun loses it and his masculine prowess gets progressively eroded. The lower class man Ansari who is not wealthy or good looking or confident like

Arjun is definitely Arjun's Other and gets the upper hand over Arjun. Ansari emasculates Arjun successfully by separating Arjun from his friends, making him wait long hours in busy bazaars, parks and lower middle-class public spaces, by making Arjun do activities improper for his class, such as slap Martin and throw tar on a woman's car. This is essentially the triumph of the lower class / caste man over the upper class man, which is essentially a major theme in New Generation films.

New Generation films of the post-2010s also present lower class/caste masculinities very powerfully in the depiction of Dalit lives, insular island lives (as in *Kumbalangi Nights*), and other subaltern, marginal realities. The earlier films, through the unabashed celebration of feudal superstardom, deliberately sidelined the dalit existences, and this was done by pushing into deep oblivion the centuries old struggle of the Communist government in its years of inception as the first government to rule the free Kerala. As mentioned in the introduction, the presence of two auteurs in Malayalam cinema, in the 1990s, led to the formation of two schools of feudal extravaganza – the Priyadarshan School and the Renjith school.

The caste of the directors in question is also of significance. A significant majority of Malayalam's blockbuster directors are from the 25% minority ... It is quite natural that these directors speak the case they know, because otherwise it would look weird like Kafka writing on America or Shaji Kailas trying to make Ali Bhai. The education of malayalam audience by these two powerful schools have precluded the possibility of production houses or

distributors venturing into something radically different. At times when they do there is always the all-powerful consumers. The popular box-office most often than not desires movies in the groove created by these two schools. That chucks the buck into our side of the court. (“The Mindspace”)

As opposed to the super stars, the Dalit characters were shown in shabby unfit dresses. The absence of agency and space assigned to the Dalit character has to be seen in cognizance with the ever-looming presence of a Feudal Lord.

The mainstream films produced after the 1990s reproduced the Dalit body, occupation, and names in socially demeaning ways—for instance, as a villain (Vinayakan in *Big B*), as a comedian (Salim Kumar in *Thenkasipattanam*), as a blind man (Kalabhavan Mani in *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njaanum*), or as a thief (Chemban Vinod in *Tamaar Padaar*). These movies are guilty of subordinating subaltern histories and world views to the concerns of megastars and their feudal episteme. (Venkatesh 49)

The case of the female Dalit body has also undergone this plight, being doubly marginalized. The black skinned, deglamourized Dalit female is made to stay as a foil to the fair skinned *savarna* woman. Revathy in *Kakkothikavile Appooppan Thadikal*, Kavya Madhavan in *Annorikal*, Padma Priya in *Karuthapakshikal*, Bhavana in *Nammal*, Chandni in *Celluloid* are a few examples.

The plight of Dalit actors could be represented by the real life of Kalabhavan Mani, who had always been in news for more wrong reasons. His

acting prowess has been proven through many movies. In spite of that, he never got a star image in the sense that Mohanlal, Mammotty, Suresh Gopi, Jayaram or Prithviraj and their likes have received. The edge provided by technology in overcoming this hegemonic structure is very pertinent. The new generation movies have worked hugely towards this. In spite of the fact that, even new generation movies use the fair skinned protagonists, the mention of the actor Vinayakan as an epitome of male beauty, by a female character to call her lover handsome, in *Kumbalangi Nights* is a welcome change.

There is a strong “profanity culture” that is part of the countercultural tendencies in New Generation films that put up a stiff resistance against mainstream, upper class masculinities. Expletives serve as a powerful protest against middle-class pretensions and morality, but also serve as patriarchal insults on femininity and womanhood. Take for example, the statement from the 2015 film *Amar Akbar Anthony*, which tells the story of three male friends played by Prithviraj, Indrajith and Jayasurya:

Kanda ariyam ivalokke purambokku colony aanennu. [From the look itself (we) can see she is from the colony] (Qtd. from film, my trans.)

The middle class, patriarchal contempt for the Dalit colony dwellers as well as for women is evident in this statement.

The profanity culture is as much a rebellious and problematic expression of contemporary masculinities as the aesthetics of violence that predominate many films of the present time. Anger, physical violence, noise, verbal abuse and

technological excesses amounting to visual violence abound in post-globalization movies across the world. Very pertinent examples in Malayalam are *Kali* (Rage, 2016) starring Dulquer Salman and Sai Pallavi, *Ee.Ma.Yau.* (2018) starring Vinayakan, Dileesh Pothan, and Chemban Vinod Jose, *Varathan* (2018) starring Fahadh Faasil and Aiswarya Lekshmi, and so on. These films can be said to express a pent-up rage at the changing social systems, the alienation of man from his surroundings, the helplessness of man before the power of fate, and what can be called the death of man or the death of masculinity.

While Mohanlal-Mammootty films of the superstar era that are discussed in Chapter 2 present spaces like the interior of the Nair *tharavad* (ancestral home), the courtyard (*Poomukham*), the local streets of the villages where the protagonists are powerful dons, etc, New Generation films present on the one hand city spaces like skyscrapers and busy roads and highways where the protagonists are alienated and anonymous, and on the other, slums or Dalit colonies, islands and remotely rural dwellings, and interiors of lower class / caste people's houses. However, the depiction of slums and colonies and lower caste spaces had always been a strong motif in Malayalam cinema, starting from the 1954 film *Neelakuyil* directed by Ramu Karyat, *Randidangazhi* (1958, P. Subrahmanyam), *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (1961, Ramu Karyat), *Chemmeen* (1965, Ramu Karyat), and so on down to *Chanthupottu* (2005, Lal Jose) which depicted a fisherman's colony, *Vietnam Colony* (1992, Siddique Lal) which depicted a Tamil Brahmin colony, and so on. The slum or colony in pre-globalization movies remained an Other of middle-class families, and was the background of the hero who rose to great power from the lower class settings, or was the haven

of the villain. A major paradigm shift in post-globalization movies is the depiction of the everyday realities and stark experiences of the Dalits and colony dwellers in these films. The beginning of this trend can be seen in Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* (1998), Daniel Boyle's Oscar-winning film *Slum Dog Millionaire* (2008), and so on which presented the realities of Bombay slums.

The 2019 film *Kumbalangi Nights* directed by Madhu C. Narayanan effectively blends stark realities with remoteness of setting. The narrative focuses on four brothers living in very remote, lower class settings in a rustic place called Kumbalangi. This film successfully attacks toxic masculinity, a caricature of which the character Shammi (played by Fahadh Faasil). A barber by profession, Shammi makes a living by curating the way men *should* look, and in a famous scene in the film, as he sets his own moustache right in the mirror, he scrapes off the bindi on it. Finally, Shammi's toxic masculinity turns out to be a manifestation of his madness. In a review of the film, Ishita Sengupta notes:

[The film] investigates into the brand of masculinity it concomitantly seems to offer by its rejection, and finds a way out of both. In its exploration of the interpersonal relationships of the brothers, it puts forth a corrective kind of masculinity: one where the constant interplay between the way men behave and can behave makes way to how men *can also* behave, where familiarity is not used as a cover to absolve the threatening, and where the onus is not on women to rehabilitate them. And it does so even as the dominant theme of the film remains of a young girl falling in love with a wayward boy and we – looking through the prism of

accepted popular narratives – are convinced that the cause of the pervasive ruin, barrenness and disorder at Saji and Bobby's household that seep into their bond is the conspicuous absence of a woman, and her presence alone can restore a semblance of order.
(Web)

Diamond Necklace also presents the theme of emasculation of the man, this time from the upper class and caste, who is corrected by the woman who represents meaningful relationships and order. Dr. Arun's life is characterized by economic and moral disorder verging on ruin. Like the diamond necklace, which to Arun is an expensive commodity, woman is also a commodity and object of sexual and financial gratification for him. Though he is an oncologist who treats cancer of the body, he does not realize or cure the cancer of the mind that he is suffering from, until the women in his life, Lakshmi, Maya and Rajasree, teach him the value of relationships and the worthlessness of material possessions. This romanticization and glorification of the woman as natural and uncorrupted is, nevertheless, a continuation of the superstar films that depicted women in the same light. These three women in *Diamond Necklace* are all traditional at heart, naïve and vulnerable, unable to understand the wiles of the man they love, ready to sacrifice for him. They all serve the purpose of assisting Arjun transform to a better man. These women are apparently independent, but continue to be victims of patriarchy.

The influence of women leading to the transformation of the male protagonist for the better is an underlying theme in many Fahadh Faasil films. Prakashan in *Njan Prakashan*, Siby in *Carbon* and Harikrishnan in *North 24*

Kaatham are other examples. A film which depicts the woman protagonist as triumphing over patriarchy despite all limitations is *Uyare* (2019), directed by Manu Ashokan and starring Parvathy Thiruvothu. The protagonist Pallavi Raveendran becomes a victim of acid attack by her over-possessive boyfriend Govind (played by Asif Ali), but braves all odds and becomes a pilot. This is autobiographical of Parvathy, for having criticized Mammooty's misogynistic film *Kasaba* (2016), Parvathy had been brought under a virtual acid attack by the ire of Mammooty fans and patriarchal goons on the social media, and this film that grossed a total of 15 crores is a fitting reply to the misogynistic Malayali men who attacked her.

Female prototypes, in Malayalam cinema, since the 1980s, have been put into two categories, those that J. Devika mentions about in her book *Kulastreeyum Chandappennum*, that is the "traditional family woman" and the "selfish uncultured woman". The female counterparts of the superheros and of the actors in the 1980s were represented as the self-sacrificing, chaste women who are happy carrying forward the directions of the men, and are always in need of a protector figure, thereby, succumbing to the male power. Malayalam female actors have remained in the margins, till the New Generation movies came up with a different outlook. This was not a condescending movement started by men.

The agency of women in roles as actors, filmmakers, editors, scriptwriters, film activists, etc boomed manifold, especially in the non-commercial sector. The commercial, mainstream movies underwent sea change in the portrayal of female characters. This includes the screen space and dialogues

given to the female actors, which was almost non-existent before the new generation cinema was launched.

The urban locale in the rapidly changing cosmopolitan world and the rise of the urban middle class, which later got extended to the rural scene, had set arenas for the utilization of the public space by women, in the new generation movies. The economic changes due to the Gulf migration and other NRI diaspora had left almost the whole of India coloured in a transnational tint, across decades.

The urban locale in the rapidly changing cosmopolitan world and the rise of the urban middle class, which later got extended to the rural scene, had set arenas for the utilization of the public space by women, in the new generation movies. The economic changes due to the Gulf migration and other NRI diaspora, had left almost the whole of India coloured in a transnational tint, across decades. The changes in the female characterization in films include a celebration of financial freedom, physical mobility at night by own vehicles or otherwise, and also to consume alcohol. *Salt N' Pepper* shows the new year celebration by the female characters by drinking alcohol and this scene is contrasted by the same engagement by the male characters. The film does not raise slogans but naturalizes the act of alcohol consumption by women as that of the men. The change in the social mechanism, caused by globalization is reflected in the way of language, costume and body language.

Under the impact of globalization, gender identity is redefined to accommodate altered patterns of social custom – posing the question of whether indeed film provides a voice for females in

the social, political, economic and cultural environment of a transforming India. The professions open to them are stereotypes: nurse, software engineer, fashion designer, or any career that makes them part of a global and urban scape. Sexually explicit language and the use of expletives by women characters probably shock the average male viewer. (Gopinath)

The onscreen persona of a female in the new generation movies had moved way ahead of those in the 1990s, mainly because of the space that a city provides them with. The independent female characters in the early new generation films are mostly away from the traditional unit of family, which acts as a centripetal force of orthodox obedience. That being away from home is an element of liberation to these characters shows the inherent paradox that the society and these films had not made a revolutionary walk out from the old structure. The instances of silent abiding to the patriarchal structures could be found dominant, as has been made clear by the analysis of the films, done earlier in this chapter.

Another point, as discussed earlier, is the treatment of the theme of sexuality by the independent women character. This explicit treatment of female sexuality doesn't fall short of peeping into the zone of voyeurism of a patriarchal set up. Capitalism, in a covert way, safeguards the patriarchal voyeurism by commodifying female sexuality. The major difference is the absence of the virgin versus vamp binary that was explicit in earlier films. It is a landmark movement that the unification of these binaries into a single individual is found in New Generation movies. Gopinath, in her "Gender construct as a narrative and text: The female protagonist in new generation Malayalam cinema",

talking about this change in new generation movies says, “These movies attempt a shallow probing into a womanhood that is supposedly liberated from the confines of patriarchy, but fail to rise above patriarchal norms and values; they end up using the same tactics and measures of female worth.”

The emergence of female stars in Malayalam film industry, Manju Warrier, Parvathy Thiruvothu and Rima Kallingal to name a few, has signalled a great change in the nature and themes of Malayalam films. Earlier films objectified women’s bodies especially through the song and dance sequences. The New Generation movies have almost completely given up the traditional style of song and dance sequences where the male gaze on the female body was at its best. Such, sexually explicit song and dance sequences, pertained to the image of a vamp to satisfy the male voyeur, while the women-in-the-house were portrayed as the ideal chaste woman.

Amid these unusual and unique conceptualizations and visualizations, one of the major factors that warrants exploration is the role or value of female characters in these ‘new’ films. This is significant in analyzing a film industry that has revived itself according to societal changes, and this research tries to locate whether this change is reflected in the female representations or in the definition of an ideal womanhood. (Gopinath)

Inspite of these developments, the struggles faced by WCC against assertion of their rights in the film industry and the many “me too” cases precipitating to the surface, don’t give a truly happy signal. The hangover of the movies of the 1980s and 1990s still loom large in the industry.

The case of caste and the LGBTIQ is more or less the same, as evinced by the analysis of films done in this chapter. It is remarkable that, with the new generation movies, these subaltern spaces have started moving towards the centre and away from the superstar movies where lower castes and identities beyond the male-female heterosexual binary, were either butts of laughter, ridicule or non-existent. The “good blood” “good genes” dialogues have ceased to make sensation. The new generation movies have taken these above said feudal assertions to such positions where these appear as abnormalities. The character of Shammi in *Kumbalangi Nights* is representative of the new gen ideology of hypermasculinity as toxicity. Another interesting reference comes in *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* where the character of Soubin makes a comment on the status of stardom of Mohanlal and Mammotty by choosing Mohanlal over Mammotty because Mohanlal never compromised on anything other than the elegant feudal characters. Though the dialogue is delivered as a preference of the character, it immediately strikes as a paradoxical one, which makes fun of the feudal obsession of the star, in the 1990s hits.

Capitalist consumerist ideology rampant in the films form antithesis to the revolutions and struggles of the Communist party in Kerala that had successfully took the lead to wipe out feudal-patriarchal structures by introducing the Land reforms, education bill, and many such emancipatory steps. The consumerist celebration of unabashed feudal-casteist patriarchy was a direct result of the Neo-Liberalization policy, backed by the fundamentalist Right-wing agenda. The New generation films in the commercial sector did not follow the feudal superhero films of the 1990s but not much happy change was seen regarding the agency of

the subaltern. The consumerist market continued its commodity fetish of the star-value in its stereotypic love for fairness and social class.

Even from the midst of the age-old fixations, the change in terms of female agency and Dalit representations better than the earlier films is a happy change. The formation of an association for women in cinema, WCC (Women in Cinema Collective) and a later formation of P.K. Rosy Film Society, by the same team are beacons of change. The democracy in terms of access to technology is one of the greatest benefits of capitalism that could be used to subvert the under-represented and wrongly represented.

As in the case of women, the lack of agency of the other subaltern identities in the process of film making has undergone a massive change through the new generation films. Thus, in terms of subaltern dynamics and subaltern politics, New Generation films show a number of positive changes but there is still a long way to go. Globalization, especially in its early days, has clung to age-old conventions and practices but has taken remarkable leaps towards a positive future. The increasingly liberal attitudes have also led to the opening up of debates related to class and caste. These movies in many ways seem to herald a better future for Kerala and the Malayali community.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Liberalization in India, which ushered in the age of Privatization and Globalization, had far-reaching effects on Indian society and economy. Foreign investment in India accelerated at this time, leading to a complete internationalization of Indian culture at the expense of the traditional occupations, values and lifestyles. People became freer in many ways but the society became intensely striated, which a huge gulf developing between the rich and the poor, the young and the old and the urban and the rural. There is now corporatization in every sector and even the national policies and governance are in the clutches of corporates.

The 1990s saw a change in the Kerala model of governance and stateship established by the first government of the Kerala state. The 1957 Kerala government had come into power as a result of consistent struggles against an unjust casteist society. The many struggles of the subaltern multitude made the foundational base of the first EMS government. The Land Reforms Act, many plans launched for equality of all human being irrespective of caste, creed, class or gender, etc resulted in a development ratio that was much above many bigger states in India. This reformation of the general standard of life that started in 1957

gave huge returns in the following years and was shaken by the Capitalist Consumerism of Globalization that invaded countries across the globe.

The Neo-Liberalization Policy of 1991 introduced by the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh and supported by the Congress government, brought it a myriad change in the Indian economy. The public sector got slowly sidelined and private, corporate sector took over. Kerala had a remarkable presence in the global scenario for the outright political treatment of life in cinema. John Abraham and Aravindan are just two names to mention among a host of talented filmmakers. Political cinema flourished in Kerala due to its Communist base as IPTA was the source of the political cinema in India. It is under this ambit of change that this dissertation tried to locate the changes that occurred in cinema, due to the symbiotic relation between society and cinema.

The larger scene of global economic changes made it very obvious for cinema to be held by the arms of capitalism. This, in turn, gave birth to everything that the first government of Kerala had worked for. The reappropriation of land and thereby implicated decay of the upper castes, saw a U-turn in this time. The pro-savarna ideologies were reinstalled in the name of cultural expressions. The subaltern identities got sidelined more forcefully, than ever before. The rise of a consumerist star culture and the commodification of the superstar, as well as the female body were natural repercussions. The flourishing of diaspora introduced different ways of doing commercial business. Cinema changed its form in terms of production, marketing and reception.

The boom of internet and the television industry was the next phase of mutation that the cinema underwent. Films were produced under the economic premises of these capitalist global changes. As the reach of Malayalam cinema widened across regions and nations, the content and form also saw unprecedented changes. The multitude of possibilities laid by the growing economic structures and corporate jobs gave a different result, altogether. A newer sensibility of cinema, as other arts, was generated that went against the mere commodification of cinema and the feudal patriarchal and heterosexual nostalgia. This category came to be addressed as the New Generation films. It was steered by a group of youngsters who were fed up with the larger-than-life alpha heroism of the Malayalam cinema.

The New Generation cinema broke the single auteur concept and was collective effort from talented script writers, directors, director of photography, actors, producers, and so on. City formed the base of these films, in a way, the feudal nostalgia was to the 1990s cinema. This category of cinema brought in a global perspective, denying the narrow feudal structures.

This dissertation studied the ideological structuring of ten select movies from the timeline that starts from the 1990s and extends to the first two decades of the twenty first century.

This study of the top-grossing and influential Malayalam films of the 1990-2015 period has revealed that these films are as much a product of globalization as they are producers of a globalized culture and society. Towards the beginning of the said period, the plot structure, characterization and cinematic

treatment of these films showed strong feudal elements, while later, in the twenty-first century, there was a marked shift towards the depiction of a metropolitan/ international, and late capitalistic culture, mellowing down the earlier depiction of feudal extravaganza. These are the predominant trends of the age that I have highlighted here, for, like it always happens in culture, various trends co-existed at all these times, but a paradigm shift of the nature described above is clearly discernible.

The earlier films of the period, starting from the Neo-Liberal economy, such as *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran* starring Mohanlal and *Dhruvam* and *Valyettan* starring Mammooty show a revival of feudalistic elements, or neo-feudalism, which means the rich people and the corporations control all socio-political processes and governments, and where commercial interests dominate the social processes. In these films, the protagonist took on a superhero, or even imperial, role blended with the image of a picaro; they hailed from wealthy, traditional, upper caste families, ruling over a community or group of friends and dependants, were supremely powerful, virtuous and masculine, upholding righteousness and punishing or taking revenge on evil; the protagonist was invariably associated with the values of the patriarchal, heterosexual family, sacrifice, patience, stoic suffering and generosity, engaged in a protective and patronizing rather than romantic relationship with the heroine, and so on. These elements certainly did not occur in the same manner in all the films of this period, but appeared in various proportions and combinations.

In *Devasuram* (1993), the hypermasculine hero played by Mohanlal is a feudal lord tormented by the knowledge that his father is not his biological father,

and is finally transformed by the heroine. There are several weaknesses in the hero: he is an erring man leading a wayward life at the beginning, he is born out of wedlock, he arrogantly insults the heroine and is not forgiven even when he begs her forgiveness, and he is brutally beaten and severely maimed by the antagonist. However, these weaknesses in turn accentuate the strength of his character and in the end he emerges as a superhero. *Dhruvam* (1993) a Mammooty of the same year as well as the later Mohanlal-starrer *Aaram Thampuran* (1997) show the protagonist as a sort of ruler of a small “kingdom” within democratic India. The message is clearly that democracy and its institution of justice are inefficient, and feudal, wild justice should rule. *Valyettan* (2000) depicts Mammooty as a loving and protective brother fighting the villain singlehandedly to save his family. All the protagonists in these films are self-made men, a powerful ideal of patriarchy and capitalism.

I have focused on the films of two extremely popular Malayalam actors and I have treated the period as the era of Mohanlal and Mammooty for a few valid reasons. This was a time when actors like Suresh Gopi, Dileep, and later Prithviraj also entered the scene and created their own fan-bases. But, the actors, or superstars/megastars as they were called, like the characters they played, took on a superhero role in the Kerala society. An article that appeared in *Huff Post India* on 23 July 2019 is titled “Can Mohanlal and Mammooty Keep Up With New-Gen Malayalam Films?” and raises the question: “The two superstars have ruled Kerala’s film industry for decades. But as a new generation shapes Malayalam cinema, how will they negotiate their future path?” Roles in films were created to suit these actors and the actors themselves played a strong part in

determining the nature of the films they acted in. So, it seems appropriate to focus these two superstars and their films as defining the era of the 1990s.

Now, what is the implication of neo-feudalist elements in these films? How does the feudal revivalist trend reflect the social psyche of the period? I have explained in Chapter Two how Liberalization and Globalization led to a surge of capitalism and corporate culture. In support of this, rightist attitudes began to flourish in the society against the predominantly leftist, anti-capitalist ideology that prevailed in Kerala then. As a result, there was a resurgence of neo-traditional values of Indianness and patriotism, leading to films that “defined” a social consciousness rooted in tradition, with nuances of the dream of a Hindu nation. I hope I am right when I propose to you the idea that in the superhero roles, there are elements of the traditional chekavans of our Vadakkan Veeragadhas, heroes who are self-righteous and mentally invincible, who can fight numerous people singlehandedly, and who are devoted to supporting their dependants. Many films of this time involved the valorization of the upper-caste virtuous Hindu as the guardian of tradition. Like Dr. Johnson upheld neoclassical traditions at a time when Romanticism made its appearance, the superhero films upheld Hindu tradition at a time when modernization and westernization were transforming the globalized Kerala society.

These were times when Kerala youth increasingly travelled overseas and lived abroad, and Malayalam films also got popularized across the world through satellite television. Malayali culture became increasingly transnational. The urban youth and the educated people became rich easily as a result of globalization. Like the American Dream, the rich Malayali youth was fixed to

the dream of a transnational identity, material success, masculine power, high social status, and uncorrupted happiness. I would argue that such a cultural scenario accounts for the neo-feudalistic elements in the Malayalam films of the 1990s.

However, the relationship between the 1990s blockbuster films and the globalized society was not such a simple one. The 1990s society was “wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born”, to use the words of Matthew Arnold. The dilemmas and uncertainties of the age are depicted by the Mohanlal protagonists’ troubled past and rebellion against the father in films like *Devasuram*, *Spadikam*, *Narasimham*, *Ravana Prabhu* and so on. This rebellion is a metaphor of a new Kerala society being born, which is in stark contrast with the age that went before it. In the post-Liberalization era, the confused society is desperately seeking order and meanings, seeking a powerful leader who will put an end to the turmoil. The feudal lords of *Devasuram*, *Dhruvam* and *Aaraam Thampuran* as well as many other films of the period, are harbingers of a positive change or modernity, and bring about order in the society. While Mohanlal characters struggled against their fathers or father-figures, the characters played by Mammooty represented the father himself, or the fatherly brother. He will protect his family against the villains and establish order. The feudal enmity in these films is often linked to business rivalry, and in later films of the period, the business / political angle became very predominant. This arguably signals a transition from feudalism to capitalism, and from modernity to postmodernity. The feudal films have their roots in the films where

these superstars played the role of the underworld don. All these films show an unholy alliance between feudalism, capitalism and politics.

After the 1990s, in the age called New Generation period also, Mohanlal and Mammooty have produced superhit films. Many of these films, especially *Pulimurugan* and *Odiyan* of Mohanlal, these films are high-budget technology depended films deeply rooted in the practices of Late Capitalism, and reinstate the image of the heroic savior in relentless war against evil, a theme that is a continuation of the earlier 1990s films.

Mohanlal and Mammooty represented two variants of the Malayali masculinity ideal. This ideal is integrally connected to the ideal of youth. The New Generation films of the 2000s completely revamp the ideals of the 1990s era. The term New Generation appeared as a journalistic catch-phrase, and has now been used in numerous books and scholarly articles. The predominant element of heroism that prevailed in the 1990s gets deconstructed in many films of this era. A new formula for the commercial film emerged in the 2000s, combining the mainstream elements with those of parallel cinema. The New Generation directors like Rajesh Pillai, Aashiq Abu, Samir Thahir, Amal Neerad, Anwar Rasheed and Anjali Menon, and actors like Fahadh Faasil, Dulquer Salman, Jayasurya, Nivin Pauly and Vineeth Sreenivasan have redefined the concepts of the masculinity and youth in ways starkly different from the language of 1990s films of Renjith, Shaji Kailas, Renji Panicker, S.N. Swamy, and so on. Chapter Three of this dissertation has discussed the theme of “masculinity in crisis” that characterizes these films and analyzed the films of Fahadh Faasil as representative of the New Wave, though Asif Ali, Jayasurya, Dulquer Salman,

Nivin Pauly, etc have also played innumerable roles that interrogate traditional perceptions of masculinity and social values.

Many of the characters played by Fahadh Faasil in films like *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), *22 Female Kottayam* (2012), *Diamond Necklace* (2012), *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), *Njan Prakashan* (2018) and *Carbon* (2018) are characterized by self-centredness, materialistic greed and moral corruption, learning their lessons from bitter experiences, and invariably moving towards a more virtuous, even traditional acceptance of life at the end of the narrative. They sport a character and a male body that is the Other of the ideal of masculinity. Actors like Fahadh embody the antiheroic common man who is far removed from superstardom – they do not speak punch-dialogues, they get more thrashing than they give anyone, they do not indulge in any display of masculinity, and are not the epitome of goodness. It is also a fact that Fahadh has acted roles of a different kind also in films like *Take Off*, *Amen*, *Annayum Rasoolum*, etc, but I am focusing on one formidable type of film narrative that emerges in his oeuvre.

The feudal films of the 1990s discussed above were based on the formula of Good winning over Evil, but the New Generation films such as those mentioned above show characters in an inner journey of becoming (rather than being), where the characters take on multiple, intersecting and conflictual roles, being at once the hero as well as the villain, lover and manipulator, victimizer and victim. However, in both the periods under question here, the 1990s as well as the 2000s, the protagonist returns to a conservative structure, which means his family, traditions, and the security of a legalized heterosexual relationship.

Now let us examine the rationale behind such themes and characterization. Even as globalization of capitalism seems to offer innumerable opportunities to the new generation youth, globalization also enslaves the youth to uncontrolled desire and consumption, destroys natural life beyond recovery and presents a desperate crisis before the youth. It is my contention that these new, deconstructive representations of masculinity denote the weakening of the nation-state within a globalized corporate scenario. Masculine heroism was conveyed in the films of the 1990s with techniques like extreme close-ups, punch-lines, BGM action, and so on where the superstar image was linked to the excesses of a feudal, capitalist culture. The New Generation films represent anonymous individuals reeling under the oppressive unfulfillable dreams forced on to them by a corporate capitalist culture.

All the New Generation films discussed in Chapter Three are structured around the theme of money / business / consumption and depict a traditional / rustic social order and values disappearing under the onslaught of globalized capitalism, social development and amoral metropolitan life. *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011) by Sameer Thahir and Unni R. juxtaposes the luxurious and amoral life of Arjun with the stringent, squalid and oppressed life of Ansari, characters standing at the two ends of the globalized capitalist society, highlighting the social inequality that is bred by the system. Arjun's arrogance and over-confidence in his power in being a rich, educated metro-professional gets rudely spurned when Ansari finds a strange empowerment in his possession of the expensive iPhone, a feeling of confidence and independence of spirit that continues in him even after he returns the phone to its rightful owner. Though Arjun seeks out Ansari at the

end and beats him up, he emerges as a better person who values relationships over gadgets and consumer products.

In *Diamond Necklace* (2012) by Lal Jose and Iqbal Kuttippuram, again there is the dichotomy between the rich man (Dr. Arun played by Fahadh Faasil) faltering in the pursuit of his desires and materialistic needs and the poor rustic man (Venu played by Sreenivasan) who understands the value of money as well as human relationships. Dr. Arun is steeped in a life of consumption and amoral pursuit of pleasures where cars, lifestyle products and women are all consumable products for him over which he has squandered his money and has fallen deep into debt. At the end, he learns his lessons and accepts relationships as more valuable than materialistic luxury and pleasure. It is significant that the very film *Diamond Necklace* is a commodity produced by the wealthy gold merchant Joy Alukkas for their own marketing purposes. Apart from these primary sources, I have briefly looked into many other films of the same era to illustrate these ideas, and shown how there is a parallel movement of New Wave in Bollywood also.

While the films mentioned above examine the negative aspects of a globalized economy, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016), a film released much later, presents the struggles of a virtuous and successful man and his son to protect their business empire from the corruption and betrayals of the metropolis. With hard work and professionalism, Jacob (Renji Paniker)'s son Jerry (Nivin Pauly) overcomes the financial losses faced by his father on account of his genuineness and trust in his business partner. This film buttresses the capitalist notions of success and happiness as synonymous with materialist gain and urbanization. The dream of the average Malayali is projected as the making of money in

metropolises like Bombay or Dubai. Such a man who makes money and takes care of his family falls into the ideal of the “self-made man”, a cultural archetype deeply rooted in Western capitalism and related to the American Dream. I have analyzed the trope of the city in this film as well as in *Bangalore Days* (2014) by Anjali Menon as metaphoric of the capitalistic dreams of the youth.

While the metrosexual youth dream of a materialistic life in the metropolis, in *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013) by Salim Ahamed, we see a man older not only in age but also in mindset, played ironically by the older actor Mammooty, who is clinging on to his rustic life and shop, resisting the onslaught of urbanization and modernization. Such films that are not “New Generation” by definition also existed at this time, but interestingly the film ends with Kunjananthan accepting urban development and city life as a better alternative to the nostalgic past. Thus, this film also focuses on the problems of a society in the throes of change from the traditional to the globalized, and shows a society where all relationships are determined by money.

New Generation films bring to sharper focus the class divide perhaps more than the Neo-Feudal films. Belonging to an earlier age, the Neo-Feudal films tend to pivot on family reputation and ancestral prestige as the basis for their respective social standing. Consequently, being poor doesn't affect the hero's position or hierarchy in *Devasuram*. Nor does lack of royal status hinder the hero in asserting his command in *Dhruvam*. However, the contrast between the characters is much more pronounced and is even the focal point in many New Generation films. *Chaappa Kurishu* finds the interplay of classes clearly demarcated with the vast expansive living conditions of the affluent Arjun

juxtaposed with the almost claustrophobic and crowded surroundings in which Ansari finds himself. Even nature seems to be conspiring against the lower classes because light plays a crucial part in lending an atmosphere of openness and freedom in Arjun's life, while Ansari's dingy and foreboding spaces are characterized by the absence of light. The material wealth and extravagance is mostly depicted in bright and airy ambience while the poor inhabit squalid and often dim-lit alleyways. *Diamond Necklace* also reflects a similar outlook and treatment.

The angle of view is also uncannily similar in both these representative films from New Generation in that the shots from skyscrapers – some apparently from Burj Khalifa, the tallest in the world, no less, in *Diamond Necklace* – denote the higher stature and influence of the lead characters. By extension, the foregrounding of urbanity is also unmistakable in these cinematic ventures. The notable feature between the two categories is that social class is the deciding factor of social stature in New Generation films while it was family ancestry in Neo Feudal ones. Most likely as the sign of the times, gadgets also play a much larger role in New Generation films. The iPhone in *Chaappa Kurishu* and the credit cards in *Diamond Necklace* almost dictate the very course of the narrative thereby underscoring the lack of these amenities with the Other. This serves to bring the social inequality to even starker contrast.

Age could be another perspective to ponder over vis-à-vis Neo Feudal and New Generation films. In keeping with the maturity and commanding power of the hero in Neo-Feudal narratives, they more often than not seem to be approaching middle-age or even a little older. Still, they are way more youthful

and immensely more powerful, physically and intellectually than most other male characters. This emphasizes their primacy and position in every way. In films like *Chaappa Kurishu*, *Diamond Necklace* and *Bangalore Days*, the New Generation hero on the other hand, could be way craftier and cleverer, but is generally much younger, more sophisticated and urban in most narratives. Similarly, the Neo-Feudal heroes have close affinities to tradition, customs and such cultural practices that function to anchor them deeper into the locale and the system therein. Naturally, they seemingly exist in a bygone age of rudimentary technologies. The classic car in *Devasuram* and the transistor in *Valyettan* denote this bend of mind while the impressive Nalukettu (large traditional two-storey house with an enclosed inner courtyard) in both of these films portray the power and position of the heroes.

Incidentally, the hero is in a relentless pursuit to save just that building in the first while the latter regains his full prestige after regaining control over his long-lost home. New Generation films do not show such sentimental attachments. In fact, the house as a marker for social status does exist but more to indicate the class disparity and social inequalities that it entails. In sharp contrast to the palatial residence of the hero in Neo-Feudal dramas, the New Generation hero is more at home in much compact modern buildings. Dr. Arun in *Diamond Necklace* is even uneasy in his ancestral surroundings. High-rise apartments are often the chosen abodes for such upper-class, urban, suave heroes, which also convey the distancing from tradition or even family, particularly the large broods that manifest in Neo-Feudal settings.

Another obvious feature, as stated earlier, is the profusion of technology/gadgets in the New Generation films, as being the products of their age – the 21st century. But the point to note that there is not always the blind veneration of gadgetry as the be-all and end-all of modern life. On the contrary, it could highlight the inherent pitfalls through trusting devices or rather misusing its vast potential. Two films taken up for detailed study, *Chaappa Kurishu* and *Diamond Necklace* convey this angle very persuasively. The intimate video of Arjun leaked through an inadvertent mishap is how the entire movie unfolds in *Chaappa Kurishu* – into a sort of cat-and-mouse between the down-on-luck Ansari and arrogant but desperate Arjun. As for *Diamond Necklace*, but for his bungling with the credit cards, Dr. Arun would never have even thought of being ‘happy’ with the rustic simpleton of a wife in Rajasree. But both misadventures have a happy ending in that both the characters turn a new leaf towards taking life more seriously and with consideration to fellow humans, instead of the wholly selfish existence as earlier.

Kunjananthante Kada stands in contrast to the New Generation films but was made during the time of the New Generation films. However, it can be seamlessly integrated into my argument in this dissertation because it shows how the values of the Neo-feudal films get replaced by the metropolitan values of New Generation films. Middle-aged Kunjananthan holds on desperately to the values of a bygone era and cannot accept his wife’s acceptance of new age technology and lifestyles. The Nalukettu of the upper-caste heroes in the Neo-feudal films get transformed into the old kirana shop of Kunjananthan, significantly inherited from his father, which is more like home for Kunjananthan

than a means of livelihood. However, these age-old traditions and values meet with their inevitable end when Kunjananthan realizes the importance of metropolitan changes like highways and the comforts and facilities they bring. That city life and new generation youth have commendable values that should be embraced is a message given by *Bangalore Days* as well. The characters played by Parvathy and Dulquer in this film stand as cult-figures of the liberated, happy urban youth of the twenty-first century Indian metros. The lingering feudal values of Das, when he tries to control his wife Divya, are ultimately won over. This film underscores the triumph of youthfulness over restrictive traditions and past.

Very much in synch with the social class and age characteristics is the spatial positioning of the narratives. As can be surmised from the firm rooting in tradition, culture and family values, Neo Feudal works tend to revolve around homestead or nearabouts, preferably rural and pastoral with a marked and unquestioned veneration for everything presumed Old. As mentioned elsewhere, rituals, customs and hierarchy assumes especial significance in the life of the characters in such stories. The sense of nostalgia and loss is a recurrent theme throughout the movie, with even derision towards the modern and materialistic gains of particularly socially lower classes. The hero's virtues are further enhanced by the fact that he is unwilling to regain the former glory through hard labour like those presumably beneath him in class. Thus *Devasuram* finds the gradual slide to decline of the once splendid Mangalasseri household which still stands proud and nonchalant, none the wiser of the loss. If the story talks about the resurgence of the hero as in *Valyettan*, the efforts are wholly glossed over and

left to imagination, alluding to some land-based industries that do not violate the strong natural bonds with the locality and setting.

However, New Generation narratives gain ample leverage from their urban or metropolitan storylines that provide a wider canvas to root their story overseas, if need be. Incidentally, *Chaappa Kurishu* proves this easy transplant capability as it draws its inspiration from a Korean original. It differs from the other copycat attempts of mainly comedies or thrillers in keeping to both the original characters as well as theme while the former opts for entirely new characters to work around the theme to the Malayali mindset. *Diamond Necklace*, in its part, easily moves between the homeland and abroad as it espouses a globalized metropolitan lifestyle in general. The overtly selfish and materialistic outlook of the hero is dealt a massive blow with the simple steadfast trust shown by his rustic wife. However, she also realizes – surprisingly, way more quickly than her husband – the futility of chasing after materialistic pleasures and fashion. Thus, the ending offers a new beginning in both films for the protagonist as a far more understanding person than ever before.

Another noticeable feature in both these works is that the less affluent do not rely on traditional or culturally acceptable vocations as apparent in Neo-Feudal set ups. On the contrary, they resort to trying to make a life out of Supermarkets or Hospitals – in short, trying to replicate the urban success that the upper class has proved possible. In this aspect, the globalized lifestyle, as the sign of the times, seem to easily percolate down to the lowest rungs of society, altering the social paradigms irrevocably for the future.

In Chapter Three I have analyzed the important motifs of these films which reflect a deep-rooted support as well as anxiety about capitalism. Shopping malls and commodities like cell phones and luxury cars, symbolizing networks of transport and communication, denote the consumerism, pride, amorality and materialism of the globalized society, developing into loneliness, paranoia, degeneration and fear. Food also appears as an important motif in these films, especially in the 2000s, to show the ambivalences of globalized life. Apart from the primary sources, I have given brief analyses of films like *Salt N' Pepper* (2011) and *Ustad Hotel* (2012) in the chapter. In these two films, food is not a mere commodity, but a culture, a tradition, a lifestyle, and serves to bridge gaps in old relationships and forge new relationships. In *Ustad Hotel*, food is an identity, a memory, a classical heritage that is to be preserved. In *Salt N' Pepper*, the highlight is street food in Kerala, which brings all genders and classes together and constitutes the collective identity of the Malayali community. Street food also offers a strong resistance to the globalized food habits created and promoted by multinational corporations in globalized societies.

In Chapters Two and Three I have shown how the traditional and feudalistic films of the 1990s as well as the more liberal films of the 2000s have both emphasized the family and conservative relationships to a great extent. However, the concept of family and heterosexuality are increasingly defused in the later films of the period. There is an unmistakable shift that we see in many films after 2010 towards depicting gender as fluid and plural. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the elements of gender, class and caste in the select films. Though gender and caste, discrimination and oppression have been major themes

since the beginning of Malayalam cinema, the predominant perspective has certainly been patriarchal and supportive of the upper castes. The chapter analyses in detail gender, caste and class in Malayalam cinema in general, and gives a thorough overview of the history of Malayalam cinema as well as of contemporary films, with special emphasis on the primary sources. The chapter examines the progressive weakening of the institutions of masculinity and heterosexuality in Post-Liberalization films in Malayalam, which has also opened up debates on Dalit identities, the harsh realities of suburban, rural communities as well as the so-called criminal lower classes of the cities.

In the 1990s, as a result of Liberalization and Globalization, more educated women started stepping out into the public domain as technocrats, bureaucrats and career women. But films like *Devasuram*, *Commissioner*, *Spadikam*, *The King*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Narasimham*, *Ravanaprabhu*, and so on presented an increasingly machoistic and tradition-bound modern hero complemented by an increasingly feminised and conforming heroine. It seems like women's increasing aware of their rights and independence in real society, led to increased misogyny and subjugation of women on the film screen. In *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *The King*, and so on there are very popular scenes that have been applauded by the Kerala society where the hero insults the heroine in a highly sexist manner. The formula of "mass entertainment" at this time became synonymous with attacking woman characters and displaying toxic masculinity.

However, there is an unmistakable opening up of caste and gender boundaries in the films post-2010. I have given a huge list of post-2000 films in

Malayalam where empowerment of women undeniably is an accepted theme. Cases in point are Aashiq Abu's *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) and *Rani Padmini* (2015), Rosshan Andrews' *How Old Are You* (2014), Manu Ashokan's *Uyare* (2019), and so on. Also, many recent films have stepped boldly outside the confines of the dominant ideology of heterosexuality and provided glimpses into homosexuality and transexuality. Prominent examples are Shyamaprasad's *Ritu* (2009), *English: An Autumn in London* (2013), Sajin Babu's *Asthamayam Vare* (2014), Jeethu Joseph's *Life of Josutty* (2015), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and so on. Films of this time also started to attack the monolithic notions of masculinity and the middle-class male's complacency. Sanal Kumar Sasidharan's *Ozhivu Divasathe Kali* (2015) and *S Durga* (2018), Sathyan Anthikad's *Njan Prakashan* (2018), Jubith Namradath's *Aabhaasam* (2018), Anuraj Manohar's *Ishq* (2019), and Lijo Jose Pellissery's *Jallikattu* (2019) are pertinent examples.

The weakening of the institution of masculinity and heterosexuality has also resulted in the defusing of the central concept of the heterosexual family in the films of this time. Marxist feminism holds that gender oppression is closely related to class oppression and the relationship between men and women is similar to the relationship between the social classes, and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Women's subordination thus becomes an extension of class and caste oppression, as seen in films of the 1990s. The subordination and sexual exploitation of women serves the interests of the ruling classes and the capitalists and is even actively maintained through institutions like mainstream commercial films. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's 1993 film *Vidheyan*

centres on this nexus between gender oppression and caste/class oppression. Kamal's *Celluloid* (2013), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and Rajeev Ravi's *Kammatti Paadam* (2016) are films that have boldly depicted caste dynamics and given voice to the Dalit.

Also revolutionary in the history of depiction of caste in Malayalam cinema is the Kerala State Film Award for the Best Award being given to Salim Kumar (2010), Vinayakan (2016), Indrans (2017), Soubin Shahir (2018), as well as the National Award for Best Actor for Salim Kumar (2011) and Suraj Venjaramoodu (2014). These awards changed the nature of Malayalam cinema and opened up the big screen to liberal treatment of caste politics. These films about the marginal people who were hitherto silenced in mainstream Malayalam cinema, in effect satirize the manners, social customs, and financial dealings of Kerala's new prosperous professional class that has emerged in the post-globalization era.

Some attempts to depict homoerotic impulses and relationships were made in the post-2010 period. Significant examples are *Mumbai Police* (2013) made by Rosshan Andrews-Bobby Sanjay-Prithviraj team, *My Life Partner* (2014) made by MB Padmakumar-Ameer Niyas-Sudev Nair team, and *Ka Bodyscapes* (2016) made by Jayan Cherian-Jaison Chacko-Rajesh Kannan team. All of these films are certainly not truthful objective depictions of LGBTIQ reality. These films offer outsider views of the community as well as insider-views. However, these films attempted to open up debates on this issue, and the Kerala society has become increasingly ready to understand and accept the LGBTIQ community and their role in the society, as evidenced by the Pinarayi-

led LDF government's active support of the community as well as the greater visibility and better participation of the members of these communities in academic, social and public sphere arenas. I have analyzed many of these films briefly in Chapter Four apart from the primary sources. As I have made clear in the Preface, in all the three core chapters, I have attempted a funnel-shaped analysis, as suggested by the esteemed professors who offered suggestions for improvement following my presentation at the end of my first year of research. The ten primary sources have been placed in a context of 16 films each from the two periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. I have referred to the 32 films in my analysis to support my observations, arguments and conclusions, but the detailed content analysis has been done on the ten primary sources only.

The films taken up for analysis in this dissertation have exerted tremendous influence on Kerala society and youth culture. In the 1990s, films were largely watched in theatres and on satellite television. The popular characters like Mangalasseri Neelakantan and Mundakkal Sekharan, or Narasimha Mannadiyar became cult figures in Kerala society, the scenes from films like *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Diamond Necklace*, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* and *Bangalore Days* have been circulated in popular culture in the form of social media trolls, memes, punchlines, and so on. I have given in Appendix 3 examples of these social media images as an additional illustration of the ideas discussed here.

Though I started my project with the hypothesis that the films of the 1990s and after are deeply rooted in the ideologies of capitalism and globalization, I have found numerous positive developments in the later films,

especially of the post-2010 period, as suggested earlier. Up to the 2010, the films seemed to be trapped in a conservative ideology, with the protagonist always returning to a conservative family structure that reinforces tradition, which is unmistakably supportive of feudalistic notions. The traditional family and religious communities are powerful consumers of a capitalistic culture. The liberal opening up of boundaries that globalization brought into the Indian society seemed an illusion.

Even when superficially our culture seems to have changed, and the constraining forces of patriarchy, caste, morality and family seem to have weakened, globalization and consumer capitalism only strengthened these structures in profound ways. This is clear from the increased number of cases of violence based on religion, gender and caste in the contemporary society. Globalized society has only turned more and more fascist, and the values of democracy, equality and unity that the nation of India was founded on have been seriously challenged. Though there is an illusion of order and return to security at the end, the anarchy that predominates the lives of the protagonists in all these films seems to represent the anarchy in India that came with globalization and the rise of Hindutva philosophy. However, what gives a lot of hope is that there are excellent films in recent times like *Aabhasam*, *Jellikettu*, *Vkrithi*, etc that attack conservative, capitalist and fundamentalist mindsets in powerful ways like never before.

To conclude, globalization and its cultural manifestation of cinema effected in a break from the progressive, Communist, liberal ideas of the pre-1990s Kerala society. The 1990s and 2000s films are replete with feudalistic and

capitalistic elements and are largely rightist in ideology, though films of other kinds also existed at this time. There is arguably a political indoctrination in these films against the left-wing class-conscious ideology of the 80s, which supports the ethos of post-liberalization society. The focus of contemporary Malayalam cinema has shifted to the everyday lived experiences of common man and the space of contestation has turned into the public sphere with recesses into the individual psyche. This is a huge welcome change when compared to the damage caused by the self-centred alpha male-oriented cinema of the 1990s. The city, as a space and the Kerala diaspora, across the globe are the two prominent contributors to the novel perspective in contemporary films. Urban spatiality is integral in the emergence of a postcolonial cultural discourse in cinema. These films, also carried the nostalgia of the middle cinema of the 1980s in Kerala.

As a suggestion for future research which would overcome the limitation of this dissertation, I would suggest the emerging and greatly significant area in Social and Cultural Theory called “Popularity Studies” using the tools of which we can examine the nature of popularity of films and the reasons for the same.

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Appendix One

Film Analysis Worksheet

Name of Film:

Year:

Director:

Screenplay:

Major cast:

Masculinity	
Femininity	
Family Relationships	
Society	
Caste	

Religion	
Rituals	
Nation	
Other Countries	
Materialism	
Land	

Police	
Crime	
Violence	
Justice	
Humour	
Binary opposites	

Appendix Two

Leitmotifs in the Films

1. Feudal motifs



Fig. 1. Autocracy: The protagonist in Devasuram (Mangalasseri Neelakantan) ordering Bhanumathi to make her debut dance performance in his “court” rather than at the temple, in return for the favours her father received. The setting is the courtyard of his traditional villa adorned with wood work, paintings, the caparison of an elephant, and so on, served by a servile and equally debauched followers, for audience.



Fig. 2. Royal vestige: The so-called king of Narasimhapuram, the protagonist in “Dhruvam,” (Narasimha Mannadiar) rules in every aspect except over the land. He is in stark contrast with the corrupt and ineffective elected government machinery. The role tradition, feudal allegiance and royal justice plays in the narrative is quite as evident as the servility of the newly appointed executioner (L) displays when meeting the regal Mannadiar (C), handsome and dressed in all finery as against the barebodied executioner.



Fig. 3. Makeover: The protagonist in “Aram Thampuran” changes from a streetsmart muscle man from Mumbai into the long-awaited heir to Kanimangalam Kovilakam in an instant, donning the suave and traditional attire that makes him stand out among the locals. Undoubtedly, the setting adds to the ambience with its rich and impressive traditional motifs.



Fig. 4. Traditional masculinity: The protagonist (Arakkal Madhavanunni) stands tall in full masculine glory, resplendent in traditional attire, right in the center, in “Valyettan.” Note the provocatively folded up mundu, aggressively rolled up sleeves and assertive stance to challenge the opposition, complete with twirled up moustache and an opulent gold-clad rudraksha chain that symbolize prosperity rooted in tradition. His brothers who surround him strike similar poses in comparable dress.

2. Tradition and Religion

Fig. 5-7. Cultural patronage: The protagonist (Mangalasseri Neelakantan) in “Devasuram” proves to be a mixed bag with hooliganism, debauchery and an arrogant attitude to life, even while being courageous, helpful and a genuine art connoisseur.



Fig 5 shows the devout and clearly upper caste protagonist renovates the traditional play house (Koothambalam) at the temple, despite his sinking fortunes.



Fig 6: ‘Peringodan,’ the idakka maestro, performs to an appreciative and enthralled protagonist in “Devasuram.” The unreserved support and patronage to cultural talents arguably shows the mettle and standing of the protagonist.



Fig 7: The icon of the traditional lamp evokes multiple connotations of culture, social stature, respect and tradition, besides faith and ideology. Apparently fitting the frame of any of the movies cited in this study, except perhaps the new generation kind, this image symbolizes the prestige and position of the quasi-feudal protagonist.



Fig 8. Versatility: The protagonist, Jagannathan in “Aram Thampuran” is tested by the antagonist Kulappulli Appan, the current feudal chief, through his martial henchman, right on arrival. Jagannathan proves to be adept in kalari. The prowess in the traditional martial arts alongside music, counter strategy and even street smartness lends the hero almost super human appeal and legitimacy.



Fig 9. The antagonist, Kulappulli Appan in “Aram Thampuran” is the very picture of highhandedness in the name of tradition.



Fig 10. Reminiscences: At the opening of blockbuster “Valiyettan,” the antagonist, Patteri Sivaraman loses his case against the protagonist Arakkal Madhavan Unni and has to relinquish to him all ancestral land held by him and his father. Family feud in a traditional upper caste Tharavad set in a temple background, possession of land and elephants as prestige, and so on. underscore the powerplay that is the central theme of the narrative.



Fig 11. Divya, the female protagonist in “Bangalore Days,” despite her sophisticated outlook and lifestyle, tries to conform to age-old norms of Indian bride and groom bedecked with jasmine flowers, gold jewellery and traditional attire. The whole narrative hinges on the clash between traditional expectations and modernity.

3. The City



Fig. 12. The city life of Jagan depicted at the beginning of “Aram Thampuran” plunges the narrative into violence and powerplay which continues even after the transformation of Jagan to a feudal lord. Though the lures and traps of the city are presented in a rather negative light, the same values of unfair competition and patriarchal musclepower dominate both the city and the country.



Fig. 13. The viles of the city and the inherent violence in urban life form the themes in “4 the People” as well.



Fig. 14. “Kunjananthante Kada” shows the disappearing values of rural life failing miserably before the lure of the city.



Fig. 15. Youth Culture and the liberal aspects of modernity are qualities associated with the City, which form the central concerns of “Bangalore Days”



Fig. 16. The massive infrastructure, luxurious lifestyle and the immense growth possibilities available to the city dweller form the major theme in “Jacobinte Swargarajyam”

4. Urban affluence

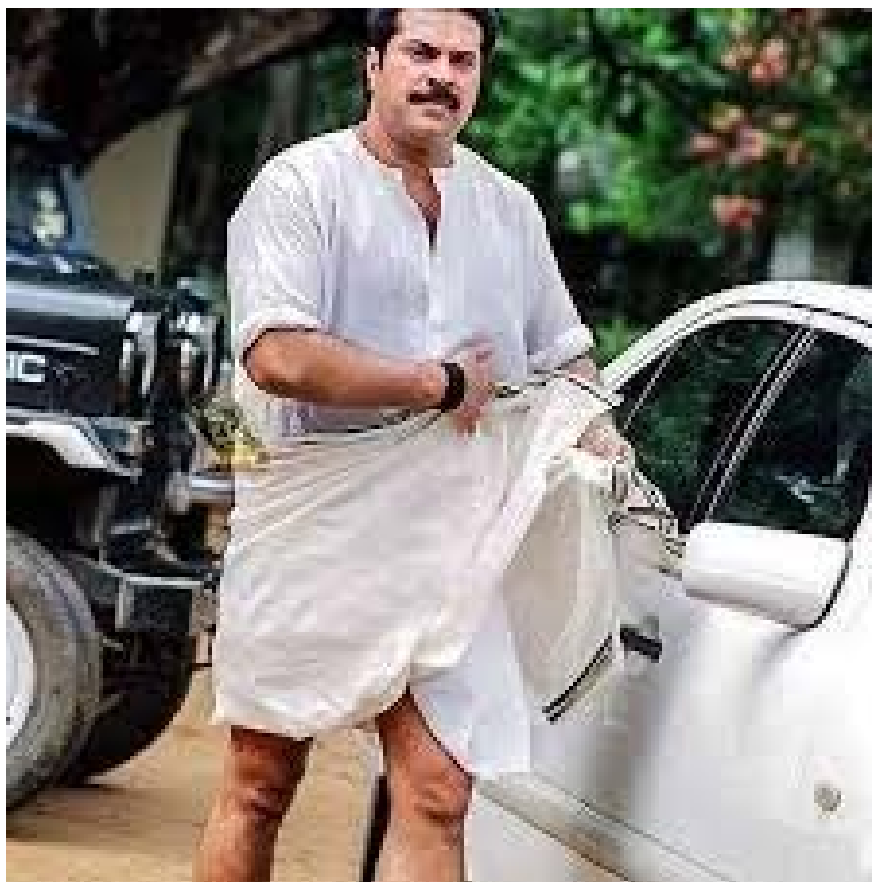


Fig. 17. The rich Madhavanunni in “Valyettan” is from a traditional, feudal family but also a self-made man, thus representing a blend of the newly rich middle class and the traditional aristocrat – of New Money and Old Money.



Fig. 18. Urban spaces cluttered with busy life and automobiles represent the trade and commerce that form the arteries of metropolises.



Fig. 19. This scene from “Diamond Necklace” represents the disposable, fast-food culture that is covetable for the urban youth.



Fig. 20. The diamond necklace is a major symbol for the materialism and greed of urban middleclass life. While Arun is the immoral middleclass who aspires an upper class life at any cost, his wife represents the virtuous middleclass who will throw away a diamond necklace for marital bliss.



Fig. 21. The shopping mall is an important metaphor in films like “Chappa Kurishu” for the trap of urban materialism that makes people inhuman.



Fig. 22. “Bangalore Days” shows that even though urban youth culture has its pitfalls related to materialism, true friendship and loyalty as well as simple joys still survive in the cities.



Fig. 23. “Jacobinte Swargarajyam” presents airports and international travel as a symbol of the gulf between a simple life at home in Kerala and the struggles of the businessman in the Gulf countries.

5. Lifestyle Gadgets



Fig. 24. Online, virtual life is a theme in many of the New Gen films represented by desktops and laptops as well as other electronic gadgets.



Fig. 25. The mobile phone which is a window into the outside world is almost a character in “Chappa Kurishu”



Fig. 26. “Chappa Kurishu” chastises a self-centred “selfie” culture that values appearances more than anything else.



Fig. 27. The electronic gadgets that is everywhere in modern cities, from your kitchen to your pocket, lead to easy and carefree lifestyles, which surprisingly lead to a stressful life



Fig. 28. That Credit cards and virtual money lead to reckless spending and financial ruin is a theme of “Diamond Necklace”

6. Patriarchy

Fig. 29 & 30. Patriarchy propagates itself through symbols of masculinity.



Fig. 29

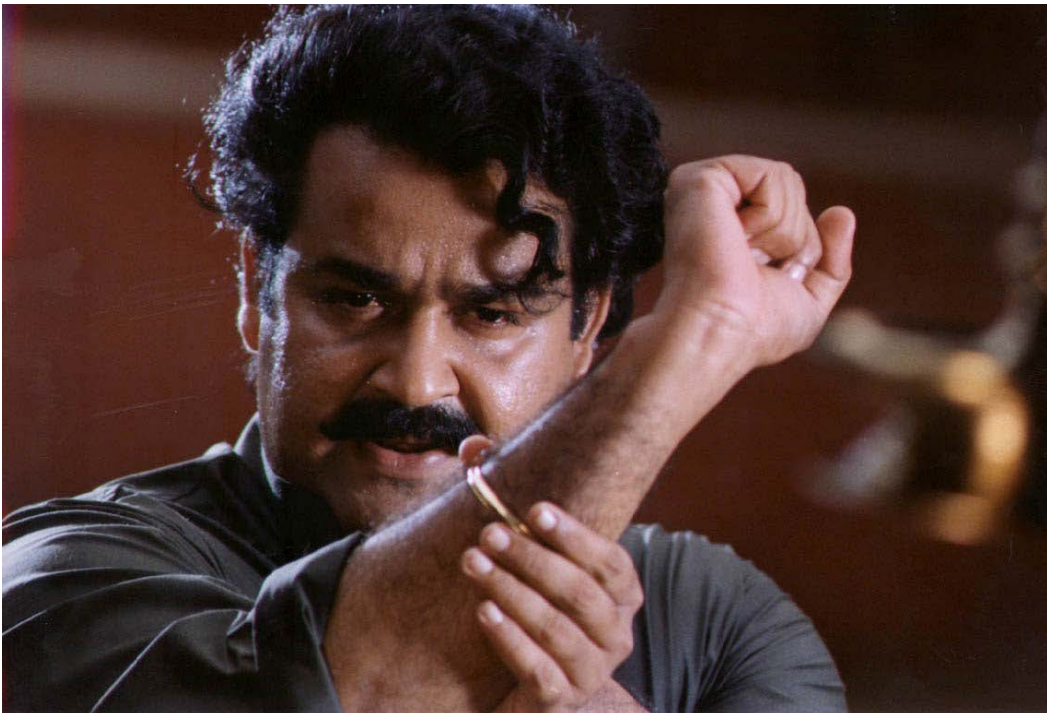


Fig. 30

Fig. 31 & 32. The handsome, eroticized male body has become a symbol of patriarchal prowess in mainstream films.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32.



Fig. 33. The power of the feudal lord ruling over his vassals as well as the women is epitomized in Kulappulli Appan in “Aram Thampuran”.



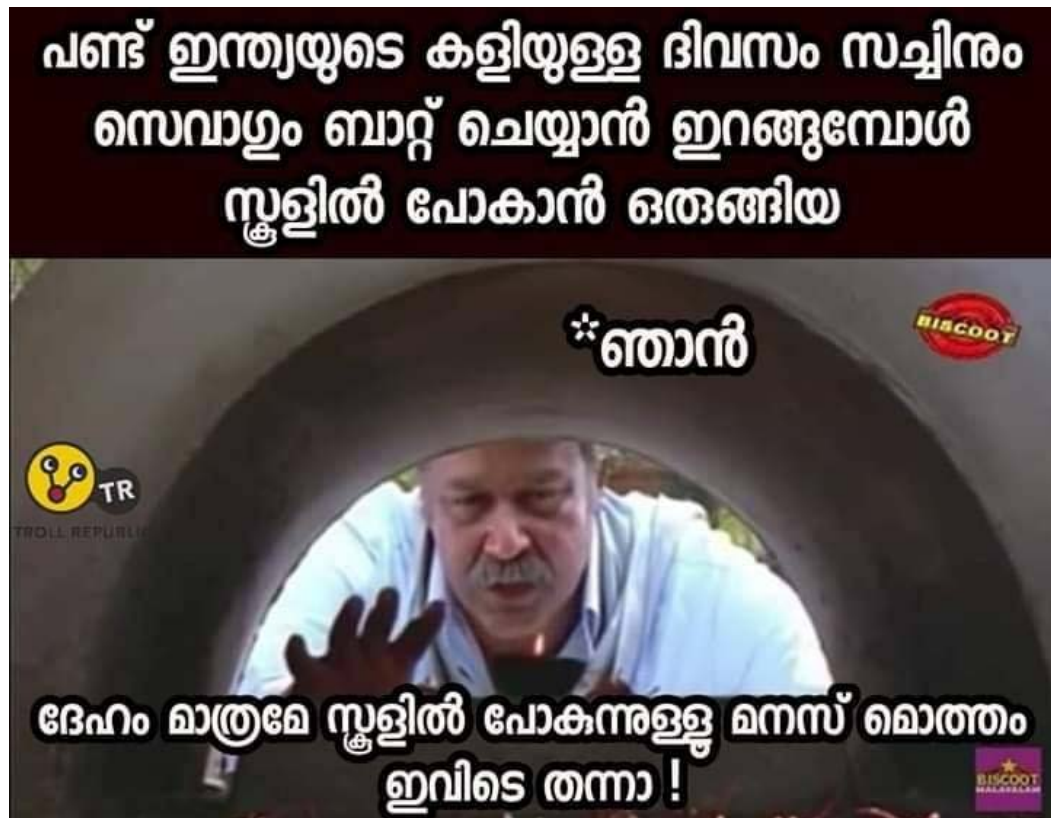
Fig 34. The facial expression of contempt and arrogance is continuously employed in “Aram Thampuran” to underscore patriarchy.



Fig. 35. Indebtedness of the female protagonist Unnimaya as well as the entire community towards Jagan highlights his masculine power and stature as a benevolent lord.

Appendix Three

Trolls and Memes























സിനിമയിൽ മദ്യപാന, പുകവലി രംഗങ്ങൾ വേണ്ടെന്ന് നിയമസഭാ സമിതി

തിരുവനന്തപുരം. • കുട്ടികൾ അനുകരിക്കുമെന്നതിനാൽ മദ്യപാന, പുകവലി രംഗങ്ങൾ പൂർണ്ണമായി ഒഴിവാക്കിയ ശേഷം മാത്രമേ സിനിമകൾക്കും സീരിയലുകൾക്കും സെൻസർ ബോർഡ് പ്രദർശന അനുമതി നൽകാവൂ.

സ്ത്രീകൾ ട്രാൻസ്ജെൻഡറുകൾ, കുട്ടികൾ, ഭിന്നശേഷിക്കാർ എന്നിവരുടെ ക്ഷേമം സംബന്ധിച്ച സമിതിയുടേതാണ് റിപ്പോർട്ട്. പി.അയിഷ പോറ്റി എംഎൽഎയാണ് സമിതിയുടെ അധ്യക്ഷ. 2015ലെ കണക്കനുസരിച്ച് 8



മേജർ കണിമംഗലം ജഗന്നാഥ ദേവൻ....















നായകന്മാരുടെ പേരിയാത്ത കാലത്ത് ഈ സിനിമ
കണ്ട് രോമാഞ്ചം വന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്



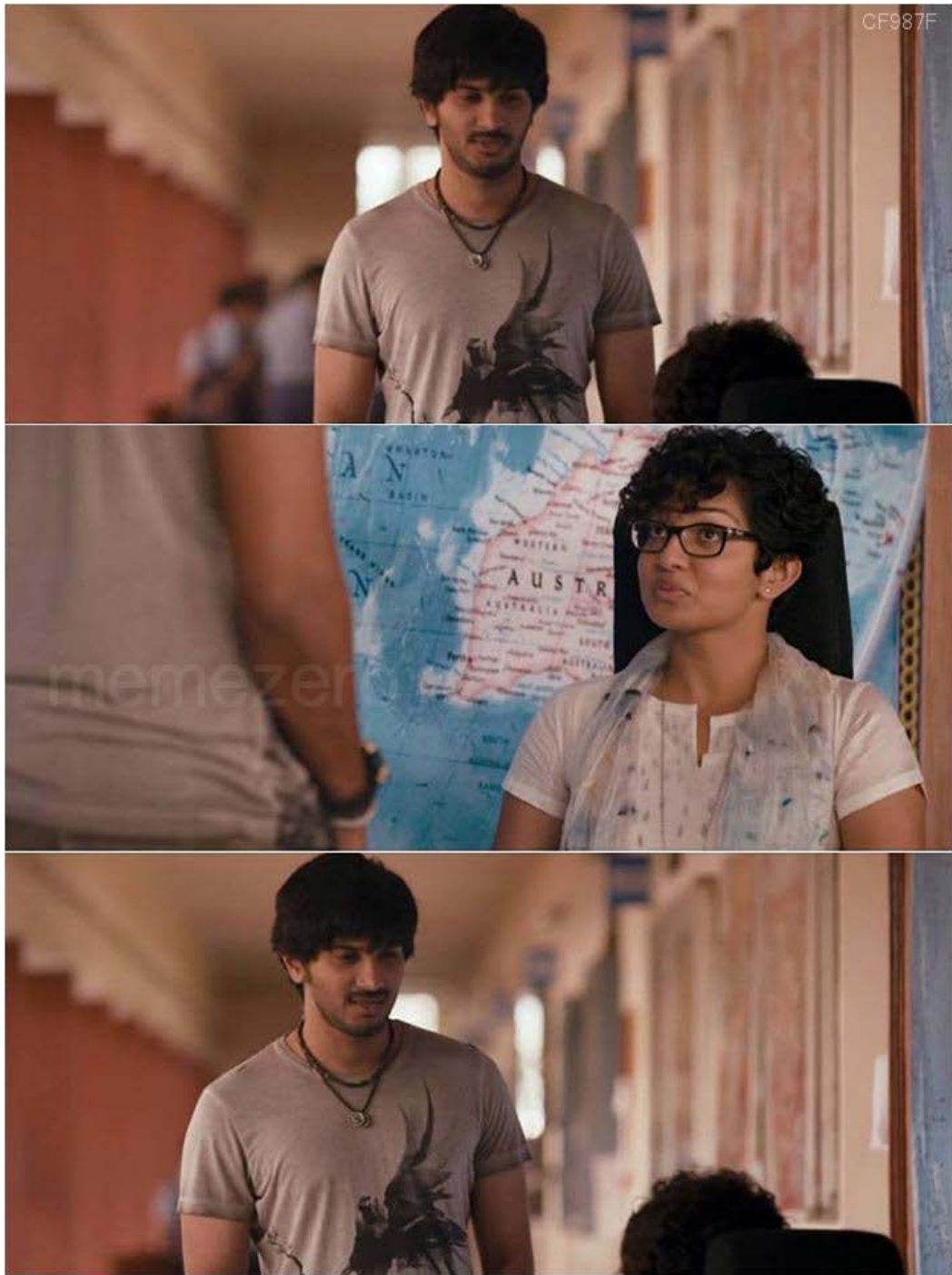
അതുതന്നെ ഈസ് ഈ സിനിമ ഇന്ന് കണ്ടാലും
അതെ രോമാഞ്ചമാണ്











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**Ideological Underpinnings in
Select Malayalam Commercial Films
of the Post-Liberalization Era**

**Dissertation submitted to the University of Kerala
for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**

by

Chintha Jerome

**Research Centre
Institute of English
University of Kerala
Thiruvananthapuram**

2020

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Liberalization in India, which ushered in the age of Privatization and Globalization, had far-reaching effects on Indian society and economy. Foreign investment in India accelerated at this time, leading to a complete internationalization of Indian culture at the expense of the traditional occupations, values and lifestyles. People became freer in many ways but the society became intensely striated, which a huge gulf developing between the rich and the poor, the young and the old and the urban and the rural. There is now corporatization in every sector and even the national policies and governance are in the clutches of corporates.

The 1990s saw a change in the Kerala model of governance and stateship established by the first government of the Kerala state. The 1957 Kerala government had come into power as a result of consistent struggles against an unjust casteist society. The many struggles of the subaltern multitude made the foundational base of the first EMS government. The Land Reforms Act, many plans launched for equality of all human being irrespective of caste, creed, class or gender, etc resulted in a development ratio that was much above many bigger states in India. This reformation of the general standard of life that started in 1957

gave huge returns in the following years and was shaken by the Capitalist Consumerism of Globalization that invaded countries across the globe.

The Neo-Liberalization Policy of 1991 introduced by the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh and supported by the Congress government, brought it a myriad change in the Indian economy. The public sector got slowly sidelined and private, corporate sector took over. Kerala had a remarkable presence in the global scenario for the outright political treatment of life in cinema. John Abraham and Aravindan are just two names to mention among a host of talented filmmakers. Political cinema flourished in Kerala due to its Communist base as IPTA was the source of the political cinema in India. It is under this ambit of change that this dissertation tried to locate the changes that occurred in cinema, due to the symbiotic relation between society and cinema.

The larger scene of global economic changes made it very obvious for cinema to be held by the arms of capitalism. This, in turn, gave birth to everything that the first government of Kerala had worked for. The reappropriation of land and thereby implicated decay of the upper castes, saw a U-turn in this time. The pro-savarna ideologies were reinstalled in the name of cultural expressions. The subaltern identities got sidelined more forcefully, than ever before. The rise of a consumerist star culture and the commodification of the superstar, as well as the female body were natural repercussions. The flourishing of diaspora introduced different ways of doing commercial business. Cinema changed its form in terms of production, marketing and reception.

The boom of internet and the television industry was the next phase of mutation that the cinema underwent. Films were produced under the economic premises of these capitalist global changes. As the reach of Malayalam cinema widened across regions and nations, the content and form also saw unprecedented changes. The multitude of possibilities laid by the growing economic structures and corporate jobs gave a different result, altogether. A newer sensibility of cinema, as other arts, was generated that went against the mere commodification of cinema and the feudal patriarchal and heterosexual nostalgia. This category came to be addressed as the New Generation films. It was steered by a group of youngsters who were fed up with the larger-than-life alpha heroism of the Malayalam cinema.

The New Generation cinema broke the single auteur concept and was collective effort from talented script writers, directors, director of photography, actors, producers, and so on. City formed the base of these films, in a way, the feudal nostalgia was to the 1990s cinema. This category of cinema brought in a global perspective, denying the narrow feudal structures.

This dissertation studied the ideological structuring of ten select movies from the timeline that starts from the 1990s and extends to the first two decades of the twenty first century.

This study of the top-grossing and influential Malayalam films of the 1990-2015 period has revealed that these films are as much a product of globalization as they are producers of a globalized culture and society. Towards the beginning of the said period, the plot structure, characterization and cinematic

treatment of these films showed strong feudal elements, while later, in the twenty-first century, there was a marked shift towards the depiction of a metropolitan/ international, and late capitalistic culture, mellowing down the earlier depiction of feudal extravaganza. These are the predominant trends of the age that I have highlighted here, for, like it always happens in culture, various trends co-existed at all these times, but a paradigm shift of the nature described above is clearly discernible.

The earlier films of the period, starting from the Neo-Liberal economy, such as *Devasuram* and *Aaraam Thampuran* starring Mohanlal and *Dhruvam* and *Valyettan* starring Mammooty show a revival of feudalistic elements, or neo-feudalism, which means the rich people and the corporations control all socio-political processes and governments, and where commercial interests dominate the social processes. In these films, the protagonist took on a superhero, or even imperial, role blended with the image of a picaro; they hailed from wealthy, traditional, upper caste families, ruling over a community or group of friends and dependants, were supremely powerful, virtuous and masculine, upholding righteousness and punishing or taking revenge on evil; the protagonist was invariably associated with the values of the patriarchal, heterosexual family, sacrifice, patience, stoic suffering and generosity, engaged in a protective and patronizing rather than romantic relationship with the heroine, and so on. These elements certainly did not occur in the same manner in all the films of this period, but appeared in various proportions and combinations.

In *Devasuram* (1993), the hypermasculine hero played by Mohanlal is a feudal lord tormented by the knowledge that his father is not his biological father,

and is finally transformed by the heroine. There are several weaknesses in the hero: he is an erring man leading a wayward life at the beginning, he is born out of wedlock, he arrogantly insults the heroine and is not forgiven even when he begs her forgiveness, and he is brutally beaten and severely maimed by the antagonist. However, these weaknesses in turn accentuate the strength of his character and in the end he emerges as a superhero. *Dhruvam* (1993) a Mammootty of the same year as well as the later Mohanlal-starrer *Aaram Thampuran* (1997) show the protagonist as a sort of ruler of a small “kingdom” within democratic India. The message is clearly that democracy and its institution of justice are inefficient, and feudal, wild justice should rule. *Valyettan* (2000) depicts Mammootty as a loving and protective brother fighting the villain singlehandedly to save his family. All the protagonists in these films are self-made men, a powerful ideal of patriarchy and capitalism.

I have focused on the films of two extremely popular Malayalam actors and I have treated the period as the era of Mohanlal and Mammootty for a few valid reasons. This was a time when actors like Suresh Gopi, Dileep, and later Prithviraj also entered the scene and created their own fan-bases. But, the actors, or superstars/megastars as they were called, like the characters they played, took on a superhero role in the Kerala society. An article that appeared in *Huff Post India* on 23 July 2019 is titled “Can Mohanlal and Mammootty Keep Up With New-Gen Malayalam Films?” and raises the question: “The two superstars have ruled Kerala’s film industry for decades. But as a new generation shapes Malayalam cinema, how will they negotiate their future path?” Roles in films were created to suit these actors and the actors themselves played a strong part in

determining the nature of the films they acted in. So, it seems appropriate to focus these two superstars and their films as defining the era of the 1990s.

Now, what is the implication of neo-feudalist elements in these films? How does the feudal revivalist trend reflect the social psyche of the period? I have explained in Chapter Two how Liberalization and Globalization led to a surge of capitalism and corporate culture. In support of this, rightist attitudes began to flourish in the society against the predominantly leftist, anti-capitalist ideology that prevailed in Kerala then. As a result, there was a resurgence of neo-traditional values of Indianness and patriotism, leading to films that “defined” a social consciousness rooted in tradition, with nuances of the dream of a Hindu nation. I hope I am right when I propose to you the idea that in the superhero roles, there are elements of the traditional chekavans of our Vadakkan Veeragadhas, heroes who are self-righteous and mentally invincible, who can fight numerous people singlehandedly, and who are devoted to supporting their dependants. Many films of this time involved the valorization of the upper-caste virtuous Hindu as the guardian of tradition. Like Dr. Johnson upheld neoclassical traditions at a time when Romanticism made its appearance, the superhero films upheld Hindu tradition at a time when modernization and westernization were transforming the globalized Kerala society.

These were times when Kerala youth increasingly travelled overseas and lived abroad, and Malayalam films also got popularized across the world through satellite television. Malayali culture became increasingly transnational. The urban youth and the educated people became rich easily as a result of globalization. Like the American Dream, the rich Malayali youth was fixed to

the dream of a transnational identity, material success, masculine power, high social status, and uncorrupted happiness. I would argue that such a cultural scenario accounts for the neo-feudalistic elements in the Malayalam films of the 1990s.

However, the relationship between the 1990s blockbuster films and the globalized society was not such a simple one. The 1990s society was “wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born”, to use the words of Matthew Arnold. The dilemmas and uncertainties of the age are depicted by the Mohanlal protagonists’ troubled past and rebellion against the father in films like *Devasuram*, *Spadikam*, *Narasimham*, *Ravana Prabhu* and so on. This rebellion is a metaphor of a new Kerala society being born, which is in stark contrast with the age that went before it. In the post-Liberalization era, the confused society is desperately seeking order and meanings, seeking a powerful leader who will put an end to the turmoil. The feudal lords of *Devasuram*, *Dhruvam* and *Aaraam Thampuran* as well as many other films of the period, are harbingers of a positive change or modernity, and bring about order in the society. While Mohanlal characters struggled against their fathers or father-figures, the characters played by Mammooty represented the father himself, or the fatherly brother. He will protect his family against the villains and establish order. The feudal enmity in these films is often linked to business rivalry, and in later films of the period, the business / political angle became very predominant. This arguably signals a transition from feudalism to capitalism, and from modernity to postmodernity. The feudal films have their roots in the films where

these superstars played the role of the underworld don. All these films show an unholy alliance between feudalism, capitalism and politics.

After the 1990s, in the age called New Generation period also, Mohanlal and Mammooty have produced superhit films. Many of these films, especially *Pulimurugan* and *Odiyan* of Mohanlal, these films are high-budget technology depended films deeply rooted in the practices of Late Capitalism, and reinstate the image of the heroic savior in relentless war against evil, a theme that is a continuation of the earlier 1990s films.

Mohanlal and Mammooty represented two variants of the Malayali masculinity ideal. This ideal is integrally connected to the ideal of youth. The New Generation films of the 2000s completely revamp the ideals of the 1990s era. The term New Generation appeared as a journalistic catch-phrase, and has now been used in numerous books and scholarly articles. The predominant element of heroism that prevailed in the 1990s gets deconstructed in many films of this era. A new formula for the commercial film emerged in the 2000s, combining the mainstream elements with those of parallel cinema. The New Generation directors like Rajesh Pillai, Aashiq Abu, Samir Thahir, Amal Neerad, Anwar Rasheed and Anjali Menon, and actors like Fahadh Faasil, Dulquer Salman, Jayasurya, Nivin Pauly and Vineeth Sreenivasan have redefined the concepts of the masculinity and youth in ways starkly different from the language of 1990s films of Renjith, Shaji Kailas, Renji Panicker, S.N. Swamy, and so on. Chapter Three of this dissertation has discussed the theme of “masculinity in crisis” that characterizes these films and analyzed the films of Fahadh Faasil as representative of the New Wave, though Asif Ali, Jayasurya, Dulquer Salman,

Nivin Pauly, etc have also played innumerable roles that interrogate traditional perceptions of masculinity and social values.

Many of the characters played by Fahadh Faasil in films like *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011), *22 Female Kottayam* (2012), *Diamond Necklace* (2012), *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), *Njan Prakashan* (2018) and *Carbon* (2018) are characterized by self-centredness, materialistic greed and moral corruption, learning their lessons from bitter experiences, and invariably moving towards a more virtuous, even traditional acceptance of life at the end of the narrative. They sport a character and a male body that is the Other of the ideal of masculinity. Actors like Fahadh embody the antiheroic common man who is far removed from superstardom – they do not speak punch-dialogues, they get more thrashing than they give anyone, they do not indulge in any display of masculinity, and are not the epitome of goodness. It is also a fact that Fahadh has acted roles of a different kind also in films like *Take Off*, *Amen*, *Annayum Rasoolum*, etc, but I am focusing on one formidable type of film narrative that emerges in his oeuvre.

The feudal films of the 1990s discussed above were based on the formula of Good winning over Evil, but the New Generation films such as those mentioned above show characters in an inner journey of becoming (rather than being), where the characters take on multiple, intersecting and conflictual roles, being at once the hero as well as the villain, lover and manipulator, victimizer and victim. However, in both the periods under question here, the 1990s as well as the 2000s, the protagonist returns to a conservative structure, which means his family, traditions, and the security of a legalized heterosexual relationship.

Now let us examine the rationale behind such themes and characterization. Even as globalization of capitalism seems to offer innumerable opportunities to the new generation youth, globalization also enslaves the youth to uncontrolled desire and consumption, destroys natural life beyond recovery and presents a desperate crisis before the youth. It is my contention that these new, deconstructive representations of masculinity denote the weakening of the nation-state within a globalized corporate scenario. Masculine heroism was conveyed in the films of the 1990s with techniques like extreme close-ups, punch-lines, BGM action, and so on where the superstar image was linked to the excesses of a feudal, capitalist culture. The New Generation films represent anonymous individuals reeling under the oppressive unfulfillable dreams forced on to them by a corporate capitalist culture.

All the New Generation films discussed in Chapter Three are structured around the theme of money / business / consumption and depict a traditional / rustic social order and values disappearing under the onslaught of globalized capitalism, social development and amoral metropolitan life. *Chaappa Kurishu* (2011) by Sameer Thahir and Unni R. juxtaposes the luxurious and amoral life of Arjun with the stringent, squalid and oppressed life of Ansari, characters standing at the two ends of the globalized capitalist society, highlighting the social inequality that is bred by the system. Arjun's arrogance and over-confidence in his power in being a rich, educated metro-professional gets rudely spurned when Ansari finds a strange empowerment in his possession of the expensive iPhone, a feeling of confidence and independence of spirit that continues in him even after he returns the phone to its rightful owner. Though Arjun seeks out Ansari at the

end and beats him up, he emerges as a better person who values relationships over gadgets and consumer products.

In *Diamond Necklace* (2012) by Lal Jose and Iqbal Kuttippuram, again there is the dichotomy between the rich man (Dr. Arun played by Fahadh Faasil) faltering in the pursuit of his desires and materialistic needs and the poor rustic man (Venu played by Sreenivasan) who understands the value of money as well as human relationships. Dr. Arun is steeped in a life of consumption and amoral pursuit of pleasures where cars, lifestyle products and women are all consumable products for him over which he has squandered his money and has fallen deep into debt. At the end, he learns his lessons and accepts relationships as more valuable than materialistic luxury and pleasure. It is significant that the very film *Diamond Necklace* is a commodity produced by the wealthy gold merchant Joy Alukkas for their own marketing purposes. Apart from these primary sources, I have briefly looked into many other films of the same era to illustrate these ideas, and shown how there is a parallel movement of New Wave in Bollywood also.

While the films mentioned above examine the negative aspects of a globalized economy, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016), a film released much later, presents the struggles of a virtuous and successful man and his son to protect their business empire from the corruption and betrayals of the metropolis. With hard work and professionalism, Jacob (Renji Paniker)'s son Jerry (Nivin Pauly) overcomes the financial losses faced by his father on account of his genuineness and trust in his business partner. This film buttresses the capitalist notions of success and happiness as synonymous with materialist gain and urbanization. The dream of the average Malayali is projected as the making of money in

metropolises like Bombay or Dubai. Such a man who makes money and takes care of his family falls into the ideal of the “self-made man”, a cultural archetype deeply rooted in Western capitalism and related to the American Dream. I have analyzed the trope of the city in this film as well as in *Bangalore Days* (2014) by Anjali Menon as metaphoric of the capitalistic dreams of the youth.

While the metrosexual youth dream of a materialistic life in the metropolis, in *Kunjananthante Kada* (2013) by Salim Ahamed, we see a man older not only in age but also in mindset, played ironically by the older actor Mammooty, who is clinging on to his rustic life and shop, resisting the onslaught of urbanization and modernization. Such films that are not “New Generation” by definition also existed at this time, but interestingly the film ends with Kunjananthan accepting urban development and city life as a better alternative to the nostalgic past. Thus, this film also focuses on the problems of a society in the throes of change from the traditional to the globalized, and shows a society where all relationships are determined by money.

New Generation films bring to sharper focus the class divide perhaps more than the Neo-Feudal films. Belonging to an earlier age, the Neo-Feudal films tend to pivot on family reputation and ancestral prestige as the basis for their respective social standing. Consequently, being poor doesn’t affect the hero’s position or hierarchy in *Devasuram*. Nor does lack of royal status hinder the hero in asserting his command in *Dhruvam*. However, the contrast between the characters is much more pronounced and is even the focal point in many New Generation films. *Chaappa Kurishu* finds the interplay of classes clearly demarcated with the vast expansive living conditions of the affluent Arjun

juxtaposed with the almost claustrophobic and crowded surroundings in which Ansari finds himself. Even nature seems to be conspiring against the lower classes because light plays a crucial part in lending an atmosphere of openness and freedom in Arjun's life, while Ansari's dingy and foreboding spaces are characterized by the absence of light. The material wealth and extravagance is mostly depicted in bright and airy ambience while the poor inhabit squalid and often dim-lit alleyways. *Diamond Necklace* also reflects a similar outlook and treatment.

The angle of view is also uncannily similar in both these representative films from New Generation in that the shots from skyscrapers – some apparently from Burj Khalifa, the tallest in the world, no less, in *Diamond Necklace* – denote the higher stature and influence of the lead characters. By extension, the foregrounding of urbanity is also unmistakable in these cinematic ventures. The notable feature between the two categories is that social class is the deciding factor of social stature in New Generation films while it was family ancestry in Neo Feudal ones. Most likely as the sign of the times, gadgets also play a much larger role in New Generation films. The iPhone in *Chaappa Kurishu* and the credit cards in *Diamond Necklace* almost dictate the very course of the narrative thereby underscoring the lack of these amenities with the Other. This serves to bring the social inequality to even starker contrast.

Age could be another perspective to ponder over vis-à-vis Neo Feudal and New Generation films. In keeping with the maturity and commanding power of the hero in Neo-Feudal narratives, they more often than not seem to be approaching middle-age or even a little older. Still, they are way more youthful

and immensely more powerful, physically and intellectually than most other male characters. This emphasizes their primacy and position in every way. In films like *Chaappa Kurishu*, *Diamond Necklace* and *Bangalore Days*, the New Generation hero on the other hand, could be way craftier and cleverer, but is generally much younger, more sophisticated and urban in most narratives. Similarly, the Neo-Feudal heroes have close affinities to tradition, customs and such cultural practices that function to anchor them deeper into the locale and the system therein. Naturally, they seemingly exist in a bygone age of rudimentary technologies. The classic car in *Devasuram* and the transistor in *Valyettan* denote this bend of mind while the impressive Nalukettu (large traditional two-storey house with an enclosed inner courtyard) in both of these films portray the power and position of the heroes.

Incidentally, the hero is in a relentless pursuit to save just that building in the first while the latter regains his full prestige after regaining control over his long-lost home. New Generation films do not show such sentimental attachments. In fact, the house as a marker for social status does exist but more to indicate the class disparity and social inequalities that it entails. In sharp contrast to the palatial residence of the hero in Neo-Feudal dramas, the New Generation hero is more at home in much compact modern buildings. Dr. Arun in *Diamond Necklace* is even uneasy in his ancestral surroundings. High-rise apartments are often the chosen abodes for such upper-class, urban, suave heroes, which also convey the distancing from tradition or even family, particularly the large broods that manifest in Neo-Feudal settings.

Another obvious feature, as stated earlier, is the profusion of technology/gadgets in the New Generation films, as being the products of their age – the 21st century. But the point to note that there is not always the blind veneration of gadgetry as the be-all and end-all of modern life. On the contrary, it could highlight the inherent pitfalls through trusting devices or rather misusing its vast potential. Two films taken up for detailed study, *Chaappa Kurishu* and *Diamond Necklace* convey this angle very persuasively. The intimate video of Arjun leaked through an inadvertent mishap is how the entire movie unfolds in *Chaappa Kurishu* – into a sort of cat-and-mouse between the down-on-luck Ansari and arrogant but desperate Arjun. As for *Diamond Necklace*, but for his bungling with the credit cards, Dr. Arun would never have even thought of being ‘happy’ with the rustic simpleton of a wife in Rajasree. But both misadventures have a happy ending in that both the characters turn a new leaf towards taking life more seriously and with consideration to fellow humans, instead of the wholly selfish existence as earlier.

Kunjananthante Kada stands in contrast to the New Generation films but was made during the time of the New Generation films. However, it can be seamlessly integrated into my argument in this dissertation because it shows how the values of the Neo-feudal films get replaced by the metropolitan values of New Generation films. Middle-aged Kunjananthan holds on desperately to the values of a bygone era and cannot accept his wife’s acceptance of new age technology and lifestyles. The Nalukettu of the upper-caste heroes in the Neo-feudal films get transformed into the old kirana shop of Kunjananthan, significantly inherited from his father, which is more like home for Kunjananthan

than a means of livelihood. However, these age-old traditions and values meet with their inevitable end when Kunjananthan realizes the importance of metropolitan changes like highways and the comforts and facilities they bring. That city life and new generation youth have commendable values that should be embraced is a message given by *Bangalore Days* as well. The characters played by Parvathy and Dulquer in this film stand as cult-figures of the liberated, happy urban youth of the twenty-first century Indian metros. The lingering feudal values of Das, when he tries to control his wife Divya, are ultimately won over. This film underscores the triumph of youthfulness over restrictive traditions and past.

Very much in synch with the social class and age characteristics is the spatial positioning of the narratives. As can be surmised from the firm rooting in tradition, culture and family values, Neo Feudal works tend to revolve around homestead or nearabouts, preferably rural and pastoral with a marked and unquestioned veneration for everything presumed Old. As mentioned elsewhere, rituals, customs and hierarchy assumes especial significance in the life of the characters in such stories. The sense of nostalgia and loss is a recurrent theme throughout the movie, with even derision towards the modern and materialistic gains of particularly socially lower classes. The hero's virtues are further enhanced by the fact that he is unwilling to regain the former glory through hard labour like those presumably beneath him in class. Thus *Devasuram* finds the gradual slide to decline of the once splendid Mangalasseri household which still stands proud and nonchalant, none the wiser of the loss. If the story talks about the resurgence of the hero as in *Valyettan*, the efforts are wholly glossed over and

left to imagination, alluding to some land-based industries that do not violate the strong natural bonds with the locality and setting.

However, New Generation narratives gain ample leverage from their urban or metropolitan storylines that provide a wider canvas to root their story overseas, if need be. Incidentally, *Chaappa Kurishu* proves this easy transplant capability as it draws its inspiration from a Korean original. It differs from the other copycat attempts of mainly comedies or thrillers in keeping to both the original characters as well as theme while the former opts for entirely new characters to work around the theme to the Malayali mindset. *Diamond Necklace*, in its part, easily moves between the homeland and abroad as it espouses a globalized metropolitan lifestyle in general. The overtly selfish and materialistic outlook of the hero is dealt a massive blow with the simple steadfast trust shown by his rustic wife. However, she also realizes – surprisingly, way more quickly than her husband – the futility of chasing after materialistic pleasures and fashion. Thus, the ending offers a new beginning in both films for the protagonist as a far more understanding person than ever before.

Another noticeable feature in both these works is that the less affluent do not rely on traditional or culturally acceptable vocations as apparent in Neo-Feudal set ups. On the contrary, they resort to trying to make a life out of Supermarkets or Hospitals – in short, trying to replicate the urban success that the upper class has proved possible. In this aspect, the globalized lifestyle, as the sign of the times, seem to easily percolate down to the lowest rungs of society, altering the social paradigms irrevocably for the future.

In Chapter Three I have analyzed the important motifs of these films which reflect a deep-rooted support as well as anxiety about capitalism. Shopping malls and commodities like cell phones and luxury cars, symbolizing networks of transport and communication, denote the consumerism, pride, amorality and materialism of the globalized society, developing into loneliness, paranoia, degeneration and fear. Food also appears as an important motif in these films, especially in the 2000s, to show the ambivalences of globalized life. Apart from the primary sources, I have given brief analyses of films like *Salt N' Pepper* (2011) and *Ustad Hotel* (2012) in the chapter. In these two films, food is not a mere commodity, but a culture, a tradition, a lifestyle, and serves to bridge gaps in old relationships and forge new relationships. In *Ustad Hotel*, food is an identity, a memory, a classical heritage that is to be preserved. In *Salt N' Pepper*, the highlight is street food in Kerala, which brings all genders and classes together and constitutes the collective identity of the Malayali community. Street food also offers a strong resistance to the globalized food habits created and promoted by multinational corporations in globalized societies.

In Chapters Two and Three I have shown how the traditional and feudalistic films of the 1990s as well as the more liberal films of the 2000s have both emphasized the family and conservative relationships to a great extent. However, the concept of family and heterosexuality are increasingly defused in the later films of the period. There is an unmistakable shift that we see in many films after 2010 towards depicting gender as fluid and plural. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the elements of gender, class and caste in the select films. Though gender and caste, discrimination and oppression have been major themes

since the beginning of Malayalam cinema, the predominant perspective has certainly been patriarchal and supportive of the upper castes. The chapter analyses in detail gender, caste and class in Malayalam cinema in general, and gives a thorough overview of the history of Malayalam cinema as well as of contemporary films, with special emphasis on the primary sources. The chapter examines the progressive weakening of the institutions of masculinity and heterosexuality in Post-Liberalization films in Malayalam, which has also opened up debates on Dalit identities, the harsh realities of suburban, rural communities as well as the so-called criminal lower classes of the cities.

In the 1990s, as a result of Liberalization and Globalization, more educated women started stepping out into the public domain as technocrats, bureaucrats and career women. But films like *Devasuram*, *Commissioner*, *Spadikam*, *The King*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Narasimham*, *Ravanaprabhu*, and so on presented an increasingly machoistic and tradition-bound modern hero complemented by an increasingly feminised and conforming heroine. It seems like women's increasing aware of their rights and independence in real society, led to increased misogyny and subjugation of women on the film screen. In *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *The King*, and so on there are very popular scenes that have been applauded by the Kerala society where the hero insults the heroine in a highly sexist manner. The formula of "mass entertainment" at this time became synonymous with attacking woman characters and displaying toxic masculinity.

However, there is an unmistakable opening up of caste and gender boundaries in the films post-2010. I have given a huge list of post-2000 films in

Malayalam where empowerment of women undeniably is an accepted theme. Cases in point are Aashiq Abu's *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) and *Rani Padmini* (2015), Rosshan Andrews' *How Old Are You* (2014), Manu Ashokan's *Uyare* (2019), and so on. Also, many recent films have stepped boldly outside the confines of the dominant ideology of heterosexuality and provided glimpses into homosexuality and transexuality. Prominent examples are Shyamaprasad's *Ritu* (2009), *English: An Autumn in London* (2013), Sajin Babu's *Asthamayam Vare* (2014), Jeethu Joseph's *Life of Josutty* (2015), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and so on. Films of this time also started to attack the monolithic notions of masculinity and the middle-class male's complacency. Sanal Kumar Sasidharan's *Ozhivu Divasathe Kali* (2015) and *S Durga* (2018), Sathyan Anthikad's *Njan Prakashan* (2018), Jubith Namradath's *Aabhaasam* (2018), Anuraj Manohar's *Ishq* (2019), and Lijo Jose Pellissery's *Jallikattu* (2019) are pertinent examples.

The weakening of the institution of masculinity and heterosexuality has also resulted in the defusing of the central concept of the heterosexual family in the films of this time. Marxist feminism holds that gender oppression is closely related to class oppression and the relationship between men and women is similar to the relationship between the social classes, and between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Women's subordination thus becomes an extension of class and caste oppression, as seen in films of the 1990s. The subordination and sexual exploitation of women serves the interests of the ruling classes and the capitalists and is even actively maintained through institutions like mainstream commercial films. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's 1993 film *Vidheyan*

centres on this nexus between gender oppression and caste/class oppression. Kamal's *Celluloid* (2013), Jayan Cherian's *Papilio Buddha* (2013), and Rajeev Ravi's *Kammatti Paadam* (2016) are films that have boldly depicted caste dynamics and given voice to the Dalit.

Also revolutionary in the history of depiction of caste in Malayalam cinema is the Kerala State Film Award for the Best Award being given to Salim Kumar (2010), Vinayakan (2016), Indrans (2017), Soubin Shahir (2018), as well as the National Award for Best Actor for Salim Kumar (2011) and Suraj Venjaramoodu (2014). These awards changed the nature of Malayalam cinema and opened up the big screen to liberal treatment of caste politics. These films about the marginal people who were hitherto silenced in mainstream Malayalam cinema, in effect satirize the manners, social customs, and financial dealings of Kerala's new prosperous professional class that has emerged in the post-globalization era.

Some attempts to depict homoerotic impulses and relationships were made in the post-2010 period. Significant examples are *Mumbai Police* (2013) made by Rosshan Andrews-Bobby Sanjay-Prithviraj team, *My Life Partner* (2014) made by MB Padmakumar-Ameer Niyas-Sudev Nair team, and *Ka Bodyscapes* (2016) made by Jayan Cherian-Jaison Chacko-Rajesh Kannan team. All of these films are certainly not truthful objective depictions of LGBTIQ reality. These films offer outsider views of the community as well as insider-views. However, these films attempted to open up debates on this issue, and the Kerala society has become increasingly ready to understand and accept the LGBTIQ community and their role in the society, as evidenced by the Pinarayi-

led LDF government's active support of the community as well as the greater visibility and better participation of the members of these communities in academic, social and public sphere arenas. I have analyzed many of these films briefly in Chapter Four apart from the primary sources. As I have made clear in the Preface, in all the three core chapters, I have attempted a funnel-shaped analysis, as suggested by the esteemed professors who offered suggestions for improvement following my presentation at the end of my first year of research. The ten primary sources have been placed in a context of 16 films each from the two periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. I have referred to the 32 films in my analysis to support my observations, arguments and conclusions, but the detailed content analysis has been done on the ten primary sources only.

The films taken up for analysis in this dissertation have exerted tremendous influence on Kerala society and youth culture. In the 1990s, films were largely watched in theatres and on satellite television. The popular characters like Mangalasseri Neelakantan and Mundakkal Sekharan, or Narasimha Mannadiyar became cult figures in Kerala society, the scenes from films like *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Diamond Necklace*, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* and *Bangalore Days* have been circulated in popular culture in the form of social media trolls, memes, punchlines, and so on. I have given in Appendix 3 examples of these social media images as an additional illustration of the ideas discussed here.

Though I started my project with the hypothesis that the films of the 1990s and after are deeply rooted in the ideologies of capitalism and globalization, I have found numerous positive developments in the later films,

especially of the post-2010 period, as suggested earlier. Up to the 2010, the films seemed to be trapped in a conservative ideology, with the protagonist always returning to a conservative family structure that reinforces tradition, which is unmistakably supportive of feudalistic notions. The traditional family and religious communities are powerful consumers of a capitalistic culture. The liberal opening up of boundaries that globalization brought into the Indian society seemed an illusion.

Even when superficially our culture seems to have changed, and the constraining forces of patriarchy, caste, morality and family seem to have weakened, globalization and consumer capitalism only strengthened these structures in profound ways. This is clear from the increased number of cases of violence based on religion, gender and caste in the contemporary society. Globalized society has only turned more and more fascist, and the values of democracy, equality and unity that the nation of India was founded on have been seriously challenged. Though there is an illusion of order and return to security at the end, the anarchy that predominates the lives of the protagonists in all these films seems to represent the anarchy in India that came with globalization and the rise of Hindutva philosophy. However, what gives a lot of hope is that there are excellent films in recent times like *Aabhasam*, *Jellikettu*, *Vkrithi*, etc that attack conservative, capitalist and fundamentalist mindsets in powerful ways like never before.

To conclude, globalization and its cultural manifestation of cinema effected in a break from the progressive, Communist, liberal ideas of the pre-1990s Kerala society. The 1990s and 2000s films are replete with feudalistic and

capitalistic elements and are largely rightist in ideology, though films of other kinds also existed at this time. There is arguably a political indoctrination in these films against the left-wing class-conscious ideology of the 80s, which supports the ethos of post-liberalization society. The focus of contemporary Malayalam cinema has shifted to the everyday lived experiences of common man and the space of contestation has turned into the public sphere with recesses into the individual psyche. This is a huge welcome change when compared to the damage caused by the self-centred alpha male-oriented cinema of the 1990s. The city, as a space and the Kerala diaspora, across the globe are the two prominent contributors to the novel perspective in contemporary films. Urban spatiality is integral in the emergence of a postcolonial cultural discourse in cinema. These films, also carried the nostalgia of the middle cinema of the 1980s in Kerala.

As a suggestion for future research which would overcome the limitation of this dissertation, I would suggest the emerging and greatly significant area in Social and Cultural Theory called “Popularity Studies” using the tools of which we can examine the nature of popularity of films and the reasons for the same.